

Roy Payne

Originally from Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, Roy Payne joined the Army before the Second World War at the age of seventeen as a 'boy soldier', and was serving in the Royal Engineers in Belgium building pillboxes and mining bridges as a Corporal in the British Expeditionary Force prior to the German invasion and advance through Belgium. Due to his tasks, he was amongst the last English troops to leave the beaches during the evacuation, from La Panne to the north of Dunkirk, as the Engineers had small boats which were used to ferry soldiers to awaiting ships. Once all the soldiers had been evacuated, Payne hitched a lift on a Motor Torpedo Boat and came home.

Following the evacuation, Payne spent a year in Cornwall organising the laying of minefields on the beaches to counter a German invasion, by which time many aircrew had been killed and there was a recruiting order for soldiers to train as rear gunners in bombers. Payne applied, but was instead selected for pilot training, doing his initial flying training in Montrose, Scotland before joining 609 Squadron in July 1942 along with Peter Raw and Humphrey Gilbert from the same Operational Training Unit. Peter Raw was also ex-army – in his case an officer in ?. Because of this shared background, and through their training together, they were already friends. Once on the squadron Joe Atkinson looked after them.

On 30th Oct 1942, the Boulting Brothers were at Biggin Hill, filming 'Between Friends' for the RAF film and Photographic Unit. This was 'a look at a typical fighter station'. One unplanned (and un-shown to the general public, as the Hawker Typhoon was still on the secret list) film sequence was later made into a training film for the Royal Air Force, to show how a forced landing should be done. Payne had suffered a puncture on takeoff as a result of "too many landings on a runway" instead of grass. Someone in the control tower had spotted it, and radioed Payne telling him to hang around in the sky for a while until the Boulting Bros could get the cameras ready, whereupon he successfully force-landed Typhoon R7845 PR-H. Cheval Lallemand recalled "Roy Payne landed wheels up. He was my No 2 coming back from a defensive patrol. When Roy dropped his gear, I saw the right wheel of main gear had a flat tyre so I told him to pull his gear up and to wait for instructions. I told him to belly land and told the cameramen who were making the film 'Between Friends' to get cracking – they did!"

During the film, there is a sequence where Payne plays a tune on the clarinet. They had hired this especially for the film, and at great expense... only to have Payne shot down in Hawker Typhoon PRV R7708 by British anti aircraft fire the very next day, 31st October 1942 He baled out, and the aircraft crashed into Pegwell Bay near Manston, (This aircraft was recovered on ? 1997 from deep in the mud about by the Hawkinge Battle of Britain Museum. Some of the parts, such as the engine, are earmarked for a Typhoon reconstruction by Councillor ? Smith, while others are on display at Manston) Wading ashore, he was then addressed in German, before being hospitalised with burns. Some postwar research indicated that he may have been shot down by a Spitfire, but Roy stated that "the flak near Dover was like rain, so no self-respecting Spitfire would have got in amongst that lot by choice."

Speaking 60 years later, Roy reckoned that the NCO pilots weren't very well known by the officers; some of them being "only there a few days before they disappeared again". This may have been largely due to them having a different Mess. While stationed at RAF Manston for example, the officer pilots used to go to have a drink at the Walmer Castle Pub in Westgate-on-Sea near Margate in order to meet the NCO's (who couldn't go in the officer's mess). At this time, they were all billeted in a local boarding school.

Payne's logbook states that he took one and a half feet of film when he shot down a FW 190 on 14th February 1943. He also took 3 feet on 1st June 1943 when he sunk a 400-ton ship, plus one foot on 28th June 1943 taken during an attack on some 'E' boats off Boulogne.

After 609, Payne was transferred to the Bristol Aircraft Company in Filton, to head up the Centaurus Flight Test pilots, as a Squadron Leader. They were flight-testing the Centaurus engines in a variety of aircraft including the Hawker Tempest prototype. He was there until July 1945, just after the end of the European War, when an engine failed in a Beaufighter forcing him to crash land once more. The plane was destroyed by fire, and once again he was burned, becoming a two-time member of the Guinea Pig Club. His burns meant he was non-operational for over a year.

In the years between 1946 and 1951, Payne was landlord of the Ship Inn at Oldbury on Severn before returning to the RAF and served as a flying instructor from 1951 until 1969, with periods in Germany seconded to the United States Air Force and the German Luftwaffe. During this time he had the pleasure of converting Germany's third-ranking fighter ace, Gunther Rall, to jets.

Roy left the RAF in 1969 with the rank of Squadron Leader, and joined Airwork Services, who contracted him to the Nigerian Air force, where he was General Manager of Nigerian Air Force Flight Training. Roy Payne retired in 1974, and has been living in Bournemouth ever since.

I have some extra detail about the battle of the MTB's, which Dad thinks was 'a minor skirmish compared with what else was happening in the War at that time'.

Anyway, here's his version of the MTB escapade:-

He and de Selys were scrambled to help out the previous pilots, and he reckons it probably took about ten minutes to reach the MTBs, flying to mid-Channel at about 300 mph.

He said:- "Just as we flew overhead the MTB's, we couldn't believe our luck; just about two miles ahead we spotted a very old Junkers 52 three-engined transport plane heading North, just inside the French coastline. We headed towards it, but fantastic flak came up at us from the coastal defences. As we were concentrating so hard on the JU 52 we made the classic mistake; we stopped scanning the sky for enemy aircraft. In those few seconds, I saw tracer flash over my wings from behind. We both broke away suddenly. I turned steeply then saw them (the FW190's) go up into cloud. I followed them in, and on re-emerging saw two planes. I thought the one in front of the other was Jean, so I called out to him on the radio. Then I opened fire on the closest of the two and saw my shells rip into his wing and lots of

white smoke emerge from the fuselage. I thought I couldn't claim it as destroyed because I hadn't seen it hit the water, however on returning to Manston the Intelligence boys gave it to me. I think they wanted to keep the numbers up. Afterwards, de Selys and I wondered whether the JU52 was there as a decoy, but quickly realised that logistically it would have been impossible. It turned out that Jean's was not one of the pair of aircraft that I saw emerging from the cloud, as he had corkscrewed away." Dad says that after that day he insisted that no tracer rounds were ever loaded on his aircraft, because it really takes away the element of surprise.

You asked about the colours of the various aircraft; firstly he reckons that as he came up right behind the FW190 he couldn't have seen any markings. None of the Typhoons had arrowheads on their fuselages

PR-H just had one german cross on (a FW190). I think the hunting horns were only on Bee's aircraft. Maybe the C.O's had them.

Dad's spinner was eggshell blue all over, but with a wide red band extending from the front of the propeller to the back of the spinner. Red indicated 'A' flight.

They changed spinner colours from time to time. They started off white, at the time when the underneath of the radiator was white. This was disliked due to recognition problems, and so the white was omitted from the fuselage, and the spinners changed to eggshell blue. The band colours were varied as follows: 'A' flight had red, yellow or white bands. 'B' flight had blue, green or black. Dad's was red.

PR-H was R7854

By the time the 'Micky' photo was taken of PR-H, they were at Manston. It was dated sometime after Feb 14th 1943, 'cos that's when he shot down the FW190. He was in 609 for 12 months, but in the RAF for about 30 years...

I'm pleased to say that Dad definitely isn't Scottish!. Ziggy said that Dad was a Scottish ex-Army officer. Not true. He is from Gainsborough, Lincs.

Dad had joined the Army before the war as a 'boy soldier' when he was 17. He served in the Royal Engineers in Belgium as a Corporal in the BEF when the war started, to build pillboxes and mine bridges prior to the German advance through Belgium. He was one of the last to leave the beaches at Dunkirk (actually a bit further North, at La Panne), as the Engineers had small boats which were used to ferry soldiers to awaiting ships. When all the soldiers had been evacuated, Dad hitched a lift on an MTB and came home. He then spent a year in Cornwall organising the laying of minefields on the beaches.

By then, many aircrew had been killed and there was a recruiting order for rear gunners in bombers. Dad applied, but was in fact selected to be a pilot

instead. He did his initial flying training in Montrose, Scotland before joining 609 Squadron in July 1942. That is the only Scottish connection.

Apparently, he, Peter Raw and Gilbert were at the same OTU before joining the Squadron, so they all joined together. Peter Raw was an ex-Army officer. Hence they were already friends. Joe Atkinson looked after them.

Dad reckons that Gilbert wasn't a good pilot. He suffered an engine failure one day, and just let it crash straight ahead without taking any action to save the plane. The CO decided he wasn't competent and had him transferred. In fact he was Mr. Turnip, on kid's BBC TV after the War. His stage name was Humphrey Lestocq. Humphrey Lestocq appeared in the film 'Angels One-Five' as a flight commander.

Dad was called in much later in the battle, so it might well have been a second German group involved at that stage.

Gilbert never flew a single operational mission before being 'bumped off' the Squadron.

Johnny Baldwin shared a room with Dad at Manston. Apparently there was an automatic promotion after being a P/O for 6 months, to F/O. As soon as the time was up, Johnny put his extra stripe on, without it being announced in the London Gazette. Bee Beamont was furious, and wanted to throw Johnny off the squadron, and wanted him transferred to target-towing duties in North Africa. Johnny told Dad that he felt he hadn't been given a fair chance, so on Dad's advice went back to Bee who later relented. Johnny was lucky enough to spot some German planes and shot some down, thereby redeeming himself enough to stay on the Squadron...

Feb 14, Typhoon PR-H, Escorting MT Boats, 50mins duration, 1FW 190 destroyed over Calais. Plus a swastika of course...

Micky was my Mum's nickname at the time. Later she became known as 'Pop'. Heaven knows why... her real name was Isabella. They got married in April 1942.

'Fighter Pilot's Gunnery Record'. It shows that on Feb 14 1943 he fired 120 rounds (cannon) and used 1.5 feet of film when nabbing the FW190.

As for flying over the waves, I asked dad how low they flew as a rule... his reply tickled me... "just high enough to get the gear up"!

Lallemant's plane R7855 and Dads R7845 were Typhoon 1A/B's i.e. had been converted to cannon from machine guns, and therefore were in an earlier production batch compared with the photo of Bee's aircraft. Bee had cannon-fairings, whereas Cheval's and Dad's did not

Dad told me that he only ever played on game of Rugby in his life. That was at Manston on January 1st 1943 when they played against a Navy squadron that was also based there. "The Navy bombed us during the game, with bags of soot thrown out of a Swordfish!".

They used to take turns to sit in the aircraft on the ground, on 'cockpit readiness'. One hot day, Dad was sitting there, strapped in, and dozed off. After a while some groundcrew waggled the ailerons to check their operation, and woke him up. He thought that was the order to scramble, so he started the engine and took off immediately... a complete waste of time!

Another one... aircraft oxygen is no cure for a hangover...

One day when he was at Duxford, he was mucking about outside the dispersal hut, and let off a Very pistol. The flare fell in the adjacent cornfield, setting the whole lot alight. The fire tenders put out the blaze, but no-one could say how it started.

There are a whole load of cannon shells embedded in the grass runway at Duxford. Peter Raw was coming in to land, and when he selected Flaps, the cannons started blazing. Gave him a hell of a shock. Someone had connected the wiring incorrectly.

Bee Beamont had been home to see his family in Bath, but was unable to return in his Typhoon due to bad weather, so caught a train instead. He asked if Roy would take the Tiger Moth and collect his plane for him.

Dad went on 4th January 1943, with an NCO (F/Sgt Barker) in the rear seat. The NCO's informal responsibility on the flight was to monitor the fuel level in the upper wing tank, as it couldn't be seen from the front cockpit. They left Manston, and as they neared the general area around Biggin Hill, Dad turned to the NCO behind to ask how the fuel was looking. "Dunno" was the response. When Dad undid his harness and eased himself up out of the cockpit, he was able to see the fuel contents behind him in the clear pipe. There were no contents! Dad decided to get down quick before they ran out, and set down in a field. The NCO stayed with the plane, while Dad hitched a lift to Biggin in a passing Army lorry.

Soon he was equipped with a five-gallon can of fuel (at no charge), and the lorry driver offered to take him back. The only problem was, Dad couldn't actually remember which field he had left the plane in! They all looked rather similar. A bit embarrassing really.

After a while, they stopped so Dad could sheepishly ask a passing Dispatch rider if he had 'seen a plane anywhere'. His luck was in this time, and soon they found the plane and were on their way again to refuel at Biggin. His logbook entry shows a flight of 1 hour ten minutes... "Landed in field. Visibility zero & lack of petrol. No damage to A/C". The round trip appears to have taken 4 days, via Biggin Hill, White Waltham, Colerne, Kenley and

back to Manston on the 8th January 1943.

In the early '50's he was one of 3 RAF flying instructors attached to the US Airforce in southern Germany, flying T33 Silver Stars. Occasionally for a bit of practice, they used to play 'follow my leader' games in the sky. One of Dad's little tricks was to have a student follow him, whereupon he would go into a dive and do a full-G pullup. The student following would then black out, whereupon Dad would pull a sharp left or right turn. When the student relaxed and regained his vision, Dad would have completely disappeared!.. I'm told that because Dad knew what he was about to do, he could tense his body to keep the blood in the right places, so that he didn't black out as well! Good fun, eh?

Dad's logbook in 2nd Jan 43 shows Joe Atkinson, as O/C A flight. From 3rd Feb 43 it shows Joe again. At the end of Feb it changes to the signature of Jean de Selys Longchamps as commander of A flight. By April 1st, Eric Habdjoorn had taken over, and he appears to be in charge until Dad left the Squadron in July. The actual signatures aren't dated; I'm just lining them up with the normal entries.

From August 43 onwards, Dad was promoted to Sqn Ldr as O/C Centaurus Flight (test pilots) at Bristol Aeroplane Company at Filton, so I don't have info on 609 beyond then.

“Hi, My father was shot down by friendly anti-aircraft fire in a Typhoon PR-V of 609 squadron on 31st October 1942. He baled out, and the aircraft crashed in Pegwell Bay. 45 Years ago I saw a photo of it with its tail sticking up out of the water. The beaches were mined so it is unlikely that the aircraft was reclaimed.

we discovered that the Typhoon PR-V that was shot down over Pegwell Bay was in fact recovered from deep in the mud about 6 years ago by the Hawkinge B of B Museum. He was on the Squadron from July 42 to July 43, and flew about 136 operational sorties on the Typhoons.

I've got the original prints of the belly landing sequence in 'Mickey' PR-H (There are 6, I think). Focus isn't perfect, because they were taken from a movie shot by the Boulting Brothers. Apparently the filmed sequence was made into a Training film for the RAF, to show how it should be done. Dad had suffered a puncture on takeoff as a result of "too many landings on a runway" instead of grass. Someone in the Tower spotted it, and radioed to Dad to hang around in the sky for a while until the Boulting Bros could get the cameras ready. They were on site at Biggin, filming Forever Friends. That was 30th Oct 1942. They had hired the clarinet used by Dad especially for the film and at great expense... only to have Dad shot down by British anti aircraft fire the very next day over Pegwell Bay near Manston, in PR-V which was recovered a few years ago. He ended up in hospital with burns, so it's just as well they managed to film him playing it beforehand!

After 609, Dad was transferred to the Bristol Aircraft Company in Filton, to head up the Centaurus Flight test pilots, as Sqn Ldr. They were flight-testing the Centaurus engines, in a variety of aircraft including the Tempest prototype. I have several crash photos from that time. He was there until July 1945 just after the end of the European War, when an engine failed in a Beaufighter forcing him to crash land once more.. The plane was destroyed by fire, and once again he was burned, becoming a two-time

member of the Guinea Pig Club. His burns meant he was non-operational for over a year. In 1946 to 51 he was landlord of the Ship Inn in Oldbury on Severn. He returned to the RAF as a flying instructor in 51 until 69, with periods in Germany seconded to the USAF and the German Luftwaffe. He had the pleasure of converting Germany's third-ranking fighter ace, Gunther Rall, to jets.

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I note from Dad's logbook that he took one and a half feet of film when he shot down a FW 190 on 14 Feb 1942. He also took 3 feet on 1st June 1943 when he sunk a 400-ton ship, plus one foot on 28 June 1943 taken during an attack on some 'E' boats off Boulogne.

No, I can't imagine that there was a Spitfire involved when Dad got shot down... he reckoned that the flak near Dover was "like rain", so no self-respecting Spitfire would have got in amongst that lot by choice.

All the hearing problems started with the Typhoons, funnily enough. Then in the 50's he was instructing a student to do a full power dive in a Meteor, and both eardrums ruptured. He has had eardrum grafts which barely work, and in one ear he hasn't got any of the little bones which do the amplification. In the trade, he is called 'profoundly deaf'.