

A NEW ZEALAND AIRMAN WRITES HOME

FROM clerking in the New Zealand Public Service to the Battle of Britain and Birds' Nest Soup in Trinidad: From the 40-hour week to rescuing shopkeepers in bombed Portsmouth: From catching trams to getting showered with incendiary bombs on Waterloo Station—the following extracts from a letter home written in Trinidad by Craig Morrison, formerly of the NBS head office staff, suggest contrasts such as those. Leading Naval Airman Morrison was at the time in training as an observer for the Fleet Air Arm. His letter gives a good idea of how the wartime world appears to an average New Zealander:

I'M afraid our general appearance is rather prosaic compared with the popular pictures of R.A.F. crews in thick flying kit. Actually, we have all this kit, but dread the day when we will have to put it all on . . . A shirt, shorts, and a pair of gym shoes are quite enough in this climate, even when flying high in the early morning. Even so, we feel encumbered when the usual parachute harness and "Mae West" are added. When night flying, we are compelled to wear overalls, or something to cover our legs and arms, as a protection against malaria-carrying mosquitoes (there is a notoriously bad swamp near the aerodrome), and also the vampire bats (*Desmodus Rufus*, if you like technical names) which flit around the runway flares like huge butterflies.

WEATHER conditions are in favour of training here, as we never lose flying time through bad visibility or high winds. As a matter of fact, the wind is nearly always constant in speed and direction, day after day—a great help to budding navigators! However, we do suffer badly from bumpy flying, as in tropical climates air pockets and convection currents are very common. We

always try to fly high—often well over ten thousand feet. Perhaps if I had not lived through so many nights of the blitz in England I would find flying more exciting. Now it seems comparatively tame, but we have our moments. . . .

IN the Fleet Air Arm the observer is captain of the aircraft. This is different from in the R.A.F. It originated in the days when the observer was always a fairly senior naval officer who went up to spot for gunnery or observe the movements of the enemy's fleet. . . . We learn a tremendous amount of naval warfare besides gunnery spotting corrections. The course is two months longer than that for pilots. Then our navigation is a good deal more complicated—we fly over sea, which (worse luck!) has no distinguishing features, and have to find our way back to a moving ship. Fleet Air Arm pilots spend so much of their training on deck landings, which are a very tricky business, that, unlike R.A.F. pilots, they learn no navigation. Next in importance is wireless, then come bombing, air gunnery, reconnaissance, photography, meteorology, ship recognition, and even a First Aid course.

IT is very heartening to find that our training is so thorough compared with the mass production methods of the Germans, which they apply to air crews as well as aircraft, with disastrous results. . . .

THE colour question [in Trinidad] is a bit of a problem. The coloured types here don't bear comparison with the Maoris. I don't like negroes because they have no culture of their own, try to live in the western style, but with squalid and disgusting results. The Hindus and Moslems have separate village communities of their own—a bit of real India. Unfortunately they are not a good type either as most of them are of the Untouchable class. I like the Chinese best of all. In Trinidad they occupy an important place in commerce, and everyone respects them for their industry, honesty, and loyalty. The white people—particularly women—have little else to do in their leisure but organise the social round. The lady of the house finds time hang heavily on her hands. As a result we are all overwhelmed with invitations. We try to reach the happy medium, because the more people you meet the more they introduce to you, until you have met everyone's friends' friends.

THERE are a number of Chinese and Creole restaurants in town—squalid places to look at but they serve marvellous food, clean and expertly cooked. . . . We are stiffening ourselves up for the prize item on the menu—Birds' Nest Soup (order three hours in advance), with such things as Kai See Min Soup, Young Foong Yee (stuffed fried fish) to be ordered six hours in advance—catchee fish!—Chow Kai Pen, Toon Phackap, and other delicacies.

AT the present moment the air is filled with raucous cries and pungent re-

marks. The Yanks are playing us at baseball, after patiently coaching us. Trinidad is about the most important base leased to the United States, because of its proximity to South America, and they are certainly doing things on a big scale. They have a temporary camp and are using our aerodrome until their own is completed. I must say we get on with them much better than we expected. The flying personnel are all fine chaps—well educated and well mannered. The coming of the Americans to Trinidad has raised many difficult side issues. As you know, they have a high standard of living, and the rate of pay for the Services is about three times what we receive. There has also been a big influx of civilians, all holding well-paid jobs, and it looks as though all this money will eventually give them control of the whole island. . . . it will be for the benefit of Trinidad as a whole. The West Indies are generally regarded as being a hundred years behind the times.

IT may be difficult for you to decide how much of our news is propaganda and how much is left out. Before I left New Zealand I was sceptical, but can now honestly say that every time I have been able to check up, claims have been honest and reliable. I could hardly believe the fantastic stories of the numbers of German bombers shot down until one afternoon in London I saw six Spitfires attack 30 Heinkels and shoot down six of them in less than a minute! The fighting then moved out of my sight behind a tall building, but at the current rate of progress I am quite willing to believe that the whole 30 were destroyed. I saw a lot of air fighting, and concluded that our claims were far too modest. . . .

THE first time I saw a mass daylight air raid was one afternoon when I was travelling by tram from Waterloo to Clapham Junction. The tram stopped and everyone got out—not to make for shelters but to watch the fun! The bombers, about 60 of them, were approaching from the south at a height of about 15,000 feet or more, and there was a good deal of AA fire, which did not worry them much. Then a squadron of our fighters swooped down on them, and for the next few minutes, the sky was a confused mass of diving and twisting aircraft. It was impossible to distinguish them. Four were shot down, then the whole formation broke up, jettisoned their bombs, and turned back. In a few moments, they were out of sight, but the fighters would still be biting pieces out of them. All this time the streets were crowded with people, cheering and watching the battle as if it were a football match. This was undoubtedly the reason for the very heavy casualty lists in the first week. After that, people took shelter more readily.

WHILE I was waiting for a Portsmouth train from Waterloo, a shower of incendiaries crashed through the roof among the huge crowd below. A girl near me was badly burned, and so were many other people. Luckily,

Shirts And Shorts At 10,000 Feet + Vampire Bats On The Runways + Birds' Nest Soup + Hurricanes And Heinkels

most of the bombs fell on the platforms, and didn't set fire to anything. High explosive bombs followed, as usual. Everyone dropped flat, and I ruined my Sunday-best uniform in the process.

THE raid on Portsmouth on January 10 was the most exciting I was ever in. Mostly they passed over on their way to other targets—Southampton, Bristol, Cardiff, and so on. This night . . . we didn't take much notice until we heard the sixth or seventh come whistling down, then we knew Portsmouth was "for it." For the next three hours, a steady stream of bombers came buzzing over, and we were never free from the awful scream of falling bombs and the dull thud of explosions. Our own AA fire ceased suddenly, and was replaced by the crackle of machine-guns—our night fighters at work. This was the first occasion on which they were used with good results—they shot down six Heinkels over Portsmouth that night.

WE went in to assist an elderly woman and her daughter. They kept a small stationery shop. The shop next door was ablaze, so they kept watch on its progress while we worked. . . . We solved the situation by lowering the bed carefully out of the top storey window on to the pavement beneath, then threw everything on to it. Even a chest of drawers with side mirrors took the jump successfully. We omitted nothing, and caused a sensation by sending a well known article of bedroom china sailing through the air.

2ZB Covers The Sporting Field

STATION 2ZB is branching out in the sporting field with considerable success these days, the boxing relays already having a keen following. The first day's play of the inter-Collegiate Rugby Tournament recently held in Wellington was broadcast, and many congratulatory letters were received from old boys and parents of the colleges which took part. On Saturday, August 30, the inter-Provincial hockey match between Canterbury and Wellington was covered, and this Saturday, September 13, 2ZB will broadcast a commentary on the Rugby League match between Auckland and Wellington.

Next Thursday, September 18, comes the Maurice Strickland-Cliff Hanham fight at the Wellington Town Hall, and once again Wally Ingram will be there. Starting at 9.30 p.m., the fight will be broadcast in its entirety.

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