

book on training. There were chaps learning to fly, chaps who had transferred from infantry and other Units. There were uniforms of many regiments to be seen, infantry etc. on the drome. Why they transferred I was told was that there was a shortage of officers who had already experienced enemy fire and battle conditions. New pilots came for the first time under fire when they flee over the line and some could not take it.

As I have mentioned I was posted to Reading to a flying school and that I should have been posted to right away on joining to learn the rudiments of flying. All the time before that was just a waste of time as I was undergoing training which I had already had.

Not only due to shortage of instructors and training machines and at that time a long stretch of very bad weather I did my first solo flight in March 1918 and it was shortly after that actually 1st April that the R.F.C. and R.N.A. services became one unit the Royal Air Force. I happened to have taken a flight to the local Royal Naval Air Force Station a few miles away and there had a forced landing and so spent my first day with our late opposition Air Force but they made me very welcome.

My first flight with my instructor who had eighteen pupils, was in an Avro No B.8617 and later did my first Solo flight in Avro No 339i. I have a snap of one of these planes.

I well remember my first solo flight. I had been on a weeks leave and got back to the drome at 2 am and got to bed in my tent, we were then in tents on the drome, hoping to sleep late. I had intended stopping in Birmingham for the night but the hotels were full except one the Policeman suggested, the Hen and Chickens which did not sound too hot. Any way there were a couple of us and we took a taxi out to the drome. I had hoped to sleep late. No such luck. My batman, yes we were now privileged, called me at 5.30 am and said "Captain wants you at the hangar right away to do your first solo flight". Well off I went and Soden took me up for last instructions and on landing said, "now don't get flurried, I am sure you will not, just keep up your head and now take off and good luck". Well, I got off safely and flew round for half and hour feeling most confident and thoroughly enjoying my first flight aloft. When I landed I kept the engine running and waited for Soden to come up. He was not long and said "You did darn well and I am sure you will make good, "Now go off again and enjoy yourself 'til breakfast time. I felt very bucked with myself. So many chaps have lost their nerve and crashed on their first solo flight, some even killed. An instructor too feels fine when a pupil has made good. An instructor's job was not all beer and skittles for it was dangerous work with some pupils. I believe on our drome at least one instructor was killed each week.

This city of Birmingham was a fine old city and I enjoyed my stay there. I had met a young lady, Miss May Forty, who was living with her parents in a small cottage in the High Street near the drome. Here I spent many an evening and when I left Birmingham I never thought to see her again but some time after the war I suddenly met her in Oxford Street, East London. Her family had decided to join a sister out here. May Forty later married a naval officer who later left the navy and bought the Royal Hotel in Maclear. What a small world.

As I have mentioned Birmingham was a fine white city but I am afraid it, with all the immigrants, is going black.

Well, the authorities decided that Castle Bromwich was to be used by Handly Page Bombers and so my Squadron was transferred to Tadcaster in Yorkshire, a town noted for its beer and breweries. Two of the machines flown here were the Morris Farman, with pusher engines. That is the engines and propellers were behind the pilot's seat and so the machine was pushed like a steam ship and not pulled as ours were. They were weird machines: two wings and miles of wire. The pilot and pupil sat in soap box like seats. They reminded one of the pictures you have seen of the Wright Brothers' machines.

We were only here a short while before being moved on to Montrose, Scotland. Here we were near the sea and a very nice town or was it a city. My pals and I soon met a very nice family with whom we spent many happy evenings. It was in their kitchen that I for the first time saw a bed let into a niche in the wall, for warmth I was told.

I was now/