**Reflections on the War by William Hadley O’Callaghan**

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Taken from Research Questionnaire by Steve Dyer, ANU, Canberra

as part of his 30 Course RAAF History Project.

***Q What was your occupation before enlisting?***

A. Clerk.

***Q. How old were you?***

A. 18 years 9 months.

***Q. What level of education had you reached at the time of enlistment?***

Public Examination Board Leaving Exam in 1939

English Literature, Latin, Mathematics 1, Physics, Chemistry.

***Q. What did your parents think about you choosing the RAAF?***

Father (Ex WWI) - resigned to the inevitability of it, and signed the papers.

Mother – very worried, as there are only 2 children and my older brother was already in the RAN.

I was vaguely excited, I guess, at the prospects of being away from the security of home for first time, perhaps of seeing the other side of the world, perhaps of not returning again. A jumbled, excited, uncertain, wondering feeling.

***Q. In your opinion, how was the training you received in Australia and the UK?***

A. In Australia good, in a general relaxed type of way. In the UK also good, but in a more determined, purposeful manner.

***Q. How did your operational experience relate to what you imagined it would be like?***

A. Much as expected, as we’d had a long period of training and slowly absorbing the whole atmosphere of wartime flying.

***Q. What nationality were your senior Group and Squadron officers?***

A. British.

**Q. What was the state of morale on the stations you trained in?**

Australia – High and good natured, as expected in groups of lads in the 18-25 age bracket in general, learning to actually fly for the first time in their lives!

Overseas – Still high, but as with the training, in a more serious vein. We felt that we’d left our youth in Australia and now took on the mould of men. Finally, on the squadrons, the full likelihood of our chances of survival began to bite into us although still in a quiet way. Not that we had forsaken the earthly pleasures.

***Q. How did you get on with the local inhabitants (in Britain)?***

Extremely well. It seemed to us that the Aussies and N.Z. ers were closer in spirit to the Brits than any others of the Allied Forces.

***Q. What are the most lasting impressions of your operational experiences?***

A. The intense concentration and dedication required for a few hours, before retiring back to a clean bed and good meals and a general ‘let-up’ again until the next trip. With hindsight (or maturity) the colossal waste of gazing down on large cities burning, with the deaths entailed as a constant reminder of the cost of man’s inability to live with man.

***Q. How content were you to return to your previous life when you were demobilised?***

A. Most relieved to feel at peace again, knowing that we’d still be around the next day. Still unsettled but not enough to disturb my hopes for the future.

***Q. Ex-servicemen have reported that when they hit civvy street they took some time to adjust to their memories of the war. What was your experience, and how did you deal with it?***

A. Not so much “memories of the war” if this implies difficulty in accepting a peaceful occupation while troubled by memories of death and destruction. More of slowing down to civvy street’s placid routine, with set 9-5 hours at work at one place year after year, having become used to working on a 24 hour system with our base of operations changing every few months.

***Q. How did your RAAF service affect your subsequent life?***

A. A sense of loss and frustration with the initial realism that I had piloted my last aircraft. In my case, having been the sole survivor of a crash, a realism also that there are more important aspects of life than merely satisfying the ego by trampling on others in the commercial world.

***Q. What importance did you attach to wartime political events?***

A. Very little, as I remember. We were involved with a sense of duty at the most impressionable age, and such matters of political events were mainly minor aberrations.

**Q. How have your wartime experiences affected your view of the world and of people?**

1. That no one nation has a monopoly of good and bad people, that nations have never learned to heed Christ’s teaching of “Love your neighbour as yourself” (short of fearing the holocaust of a nuclear war) and that old feelings of chauvinism are now being replaced in the Western world by those of hedonism. It is far, far better for nations to talk to each other than to try to kill each other, for….. *Nothing!*