

LT. COLONEL BILL CARLILE

ENLISTED AS AVIATION CADET, MARCH 1942

PROGRESSED THROUGH PILOT TRAINING UNTIL INJURED AND ELIMINATED OCT 42

PICKED TO BE SENT TO 8TH AIR FORCE TO STUDY FLYING CONTROL WITH RAF

ARRIVED IN ENGLAND APRIL 1943 WITH 74 OTHER SELECTEES

STARTED TRAINING WITH RAF MAY 1943

GRADUATED FROM WATCHFIELD SEPT 1943  
(50% OF THE CLASS FAILED THE COURSE)

COMMISSIONED AS 2ND LIEUTENANT

PROMOTED TO 1ST LIEUTENANT SEPT 1944  
(THANKS TO GENERAL RADER)

RETURNED TO U.S DEC 1945 REMAINED IN RESERVES

RECALLED KOREA AUG 1951  
SERVED AS CAPTAIN OM AIR DEFENSE COMMAND

TRANSFERRED TO RETIRED RESERVE FEB 1969





National Capital Area Chapter of  
The Eighth Air Force Historical Society

SPRING CHAPTER MEETING  
CONTROL TOWER OPERATIONS

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When I was asked to talk about flying control in the 8th AF, I didn't know exactly what to tell you. Among his many and varied duties, the flying control officer was first and foremost an air traffic controller at base level. However, since most of you know that the air traffic controller is the voice from the tower telling you to go around when on final approach, at least one engine feathered and running of gasoline fumes, I decided to keep that part to a minimum. Instead I will try to tell you little of the history of British flying control as I know it, how a group of us were selected for the training, a good bit about that training, and perhaps throw in a tale or two.

Early in the war the RAF found ~~that~~<sup>THEY</sup> had problems controlling their aircraft, particularly at night, due to lack of experience in night flying, black-out conditions, radio silence, German intruder aircraft, weather, etc. Many of the returning night operational aircraft were losing their way and ending up in a Brussel sprout patch instead of an airfield. Much thought must have gone into designing the system. It was fairly simple, yet did a fantastic job. The RAF people came up with a runway lighting system that could only be seen on final approach, an outer circle of lights that led you to the runway in use, an angle of glide system that permitted a pilot to make a proper landing final approach. They also had a system for navigating around blacked out Britain, called pundits and occults. These were mobile bright lights that flashed morse codes, one being red the other white. The red one, called pundit, was always within a couple miles of an airfield. Navigators were always briefed on the locations of these lights before any night flying would take place. Remember the darky system? You had temporarily lost your position, just call "Darky" using the proper procedures, and an airbase would answer you. They could then offer you landing instructions, tell you where you were, or give you a course for home. The darky facilities used a common frequency throughout

Britain. Another innovation the RAF had was the signal square in front of the control tower. This square showed the status of the field in an easily read system of signals. The field ID was indicated by a large two letter display (TL was Thurleigh). There was a landing T to indicate landing direction. A smaller bright red square was in the signal area ~~to~~ indicate the status of the field, serviceable, unserviceable, and denoted this information by yellow stripes placed on it. Beams were available for instrument approaches. Rockets, signal mortars and flares were handy to attract the attention of wandering aircraft as needed. There is considerably more to the flying control system, but as you can see the RAF came up with a workable system that was quite remarkable at that time.

How did one get selected for this type of air force duty? In my case, unfortunately, was to be washed out of pilot training with a lot of flying hours. The air force took a dim view of landing their twin engine aircraft ten feet in the air, they bend. I had lost my depth perception (temporarily) in an athletic accident and did not know it. Thought my head was harder than that. I have always felt that after being eliminated from flying training, ~~that~~ the only place the air force was going to let me go was to <sup>THE RAF</sup> flying control school. Apparently, about the time I washed out, a request for flying control candidates must have been sent to the various unassigned pools where poor souls such as we were sent. Whatever duty I tried for, the answer was NO. Navigator, bombardier, gunner, admin. officer, the answer was always NO. One day I was called before an officer, he discussed my previous training, the requests made for other air training etc., which he laughingly noted had been refused, all very casually. Suddenly he asked "would I go overseas right now?" what else could one say under the circumstances, but "YES". I was then told I would go overseas, go to

school and if successful become a 2nd Lt. The joker being he would not tell me where, when or what it was all about. Anyway 75 of us were selected, and in a very short time were on our way to England. Only after arrival did we find out what our lot was to be. Now we were about to begin our training.

After we arrived in England, our group was split up and parcelled out in pairs for some pre-schooling at the various RAF bases. With only two "Yanks" per base<sup>and</sup> with about 3000 people in blue uniforms, it was a bit lonely. Fortunately for me, a British RAF Corporal also taking the same course offered his friendship - took me to his home shortly after we met. That gentleman and I have been friends since 1943, and I'm <sup>Was</sup> ~~going~~ over to see him in <sup>October 2002</sup> ~~August~~. So we have a friendship that is now <sup>almost</sup> ~~10~~ years old - not all things are bad in war.

The first month at the RAF base was a look and see type of thing. When they thought we had learned something about flying control by doing the various duties, we were sent to school. The RAF had set up a couple of schools, and I went to a place called Watchfield, not too far from Salisbury. Incidentally a very lovely part of England. I think this was the toughest school I have ever attended.

Subjects at the school were taught in a classroom atmosphere followed by putting all our training into practical use. In these class room periods we studied flying control, navigation, weather, communications, codes and a number of other subjects. The flying control curriculum consisted of proper aircraft control procedures for local airfield control, airfield lighting, airfield inspection, use of the various documents furnished the tower (both secret and non-secret), diversion of aircraft, foul weather landing and take off procedures, <sup>AND</sup> how to use the various signalling devices (rockets, flare guns, signal mortar and signal lamps). During this part of our training we also became familiar with the codes used by the RAF (Morse, Bomber Code,

and the Q codes). All of us are familiar with the morse codes, so I won't go into them except to say we were required to read this code at a certain number of characters per minute. The bomber code was a secret code that changed every day and consisted of two letters for each letter of the alphabet, plus some two letter codes for special words that would normally be sent to a bomber aircraft - such as the word "weather" might be AB, "return to base" might be AX etc. This code was fairly easy to break, thus a new code each and every day. The RAF knew the German could break the codes, but by the time they did, that particular code/<sup>was</sup> of out-of-date. The Q codes consisted of three letters, for each particular item involved. Nothing that I can think of at this time was considered secret - QDM had to do with a course for an aircraft to steer, QFE had to do with altimeter setting. There were quite a number of these Q codes and we had to memorize most of them. START

For the practical end of the flying control course, our school had a mock-up ~~of a~~ control tower. Inside were all the things that you would find in a real tower, radios, telephones, lighting panels, etc. This was the time they found out who would stay and who would be shipped out. It was bugged in such a way our instructors could hear even our most trivial conversations. All of the students had to take part, somebody was flying control officer, another the radio operator, etc. Our total class was broken down into smaller groups and led like sheep into this pressure cooker. I had the dubious honor of being the first FCO in our little group. When we first entered into this tower we were expected to go through all of the preliminary actions as taught to us in class, i.e., check with operations, weather, intelligence, etc., just to get the shift set up and running. Then the real fun began.

It started off rather slowly, an aircraft called in for landing instructions. The aircraft landed went directly to dispersal, no

problem. About that time I smelled a rat - The Royal Air Force did not put all of us through all that school room study just to tell an aircraft the proper runway to use. Was I right, because then and there all hell broke loose. A major air raid on our airfield began to take place, and with complete sound effects. You could ~~see~~<sup>hear</sup> machine gun fire, bombs bursting, anti aircraft guns going off, the whole works. And, of course, there were no diversion stations available, and all aircraft calling in were either very short of fuel or damaged by enemy action - all requiring immediate landing. All the action was greatly speeded up. What would normally take ten or fifteen minutes such as changing to another runway, putting down a minimum flare path, you might be allowed two minutes. As fast as you took corrective action the enemy would bomb whatever you did. This was a no-win situation for the students, and it was planned that way. The instructors were more interested in your actions and reactions than letting you come to a happy solution.

All this action was not without a bit of comedy. I remember the sergeant out in the caravan calling in and wanting to go to the Naffi (RAF Red Cross Club) for a cup of tea. Of course, that request had to be denied. Farmer Jones called informing us that he had captured a German pilot and would we please come and get him because it was milking time. A 'phone call to the Air Police solved this problem.

We were really worked over in this mack up tower. Finally when they knew you were getting pretty "beat", a huge explosion and crash was heard, then silence. Three RAF officers came out of door laughing and informed us that we had suffered a direct bomb hit and we were all dead. Now there was an immediate critique that lasted about 30 minutes, where we found out what we did right and what we did wrong.

END

So we went back to classes for more studies until exams rolled around.

The RAF also tried to teach us to be navigators. We had considerable ground school and quite a bit of actual flying. We studied the various types of map projections, such as the Mercator, worked at plotting courses on maps, using various weather conditions as furnished by our ever present instructors. When it came time for us to fly we were put in an aircraft called an Anson. You haven't lived until you have had a flight in an Anson. It was an old fabric covered twin engine aircraft, probably one of the earliest RAF light bomber aircraft. I saw a picture of one when it was used as an operational aircraft, it had a huge big "bird cage" type turret on the rear of the fuselage, with what I surmised was a drum fed lewis gun in it. Our aircraft, of course, had been converted for training purposes and about five of us went up in these things at one time. One thing I remember about the aircraft was the vibration as it flew. If you had to draw a straight line on a map, you were lucky to get it done.

First off they took us up and let us navigate around southwestern Great Britain. This wasn't very difficult since we flew at fairly low altitudes, in decent weather, and ~~use~~ use of the excellent English maps. These maps were much better than we used when I was in pilot training here in the USA, very good and accurate details. Then we went up at night. Trying to navigate <sup>AN</sup> ~~and~~ airplane at night over blacked-out England, was like flying through ink. Of course, we had been briefed as to the wind direction, various navigational lights on the ground and, best of all, a pilot who probably had flown that particular course about a hundred times. This training was great and we seemed to enjoy it. However, flying late at night and school all day, makes for a long long day.



We had a pretty good weather course at Watchfield. We were required to construct weather maps from various data supplied, barometric pressures, isobars, fronts all had to be plotted. They would take us outside and show us the various types of clouds in the sky. The weather in England was so changeable, that you usually had a good selection to look at every day. The course was apparently aimed at giving us an idea what to expect from the weather, so we could be prepared to cope with it when we were sent to our respective bases. The RAF and USAAF both had excellent weather people that kept the flying control officers well informed, but knowing what the other guy is talking about always helps.

The three subjects mentioned ~~below~~<sup>above</sup> were our primary subjects. I remember receiving instruction in proper communication procedures, being tested on being able to read morse code and perhaps a few other things that the RAF people felt we should know.

This brings us to the final examinations. I think we were tested on about five subjects, and all examinations were written, no multiple choice questions. The exams were long enough and thorough enough that the written portion took two days to complete, a real grind. The night before the examination period was to start, and we were all about to do some last minute review, who walks in but our RAF adviser. He took away all note books and texts, with the comment "if you don't know it now you aren't going to learn it tonight." All of us, including the RAF officer then adjourned to the local pub and had a party.

Our notebooks were returned after the tests with the suggestion it would be well to review any areas we felt needed brushing up. This was excellent advice.

Shortly after the written tests were over, and I am sure reviewed and marked as to passing or failure, we were called before a board consisting of two RAF officers and an American officer. We were given an oral examination, and sure enough the questions asked were some of ~~the~~<sup>our</sup> weak

points on the written tests. Standing before a board such as this is not an easy thing to do, particularly when you realize your future probably depends on your answers, and it did. It took these gentlemen about 15 minutes of questioning before they told Corporal Carlile he had passed the course and in due time would be commissioned a 2Lt. Some of our people were in that room for almost an hour, and many of those did not pass the course, thus no commission. A little more than half of the 75 who started on the long journey that began in California made the grade.

Within a very short time we were commissioned and again sent back to the RAF base we had originally visited. It was great to go back and see some of the people you had been drinking beer with and they were all very happy we had succeeded. Unfortunately at that RAF base we were not allowed to drink beer with the EM's. About a month later I was summoned to London (8th AF Hq.) for reassignment to a base within the 8th airforce. Unfortunately to the 92nd Bomb Group.

I found out very quickly that not all American bases accepted the concept of flying control. At Podington they wanted little if anything to do with someone without a pair of silver wings on their chest telling the 92nd pilots what to do. For a couple of months all I did was waste time, we weren't even allowed into operations. The operations people would call up and tell us what runway to use, take off time. Finally one of the operations officers would hand the Senior Flying Control Officer a list of the aircraft and pilots so we could list them on the operations board in the control tower. ~~Finally~~ On one of those lovely winter days that Britain is famous for - rain, fog, etc. - everyone was just standing around doing little if anything, unfortunately we were trying to land an operational mission return. As I recall, the aircraft were having one heck of a time lining up on final approach, overshooting the final turn, undershooting the final

turn to land. I told the caravan operator to fire yellow flares down the runway when he saw an aircraft turning on final approach, which he did. This was a trick the RAF suggested we do in bad visibility to help aircraft line up for landing. As soon as the flares were fired the operations people asked who was responsible ~~the~~ <sup>for</sup> the flare firing. When they found out it was me, they proceeded to peel the skin off my back side for about ten minutes. Later I asked the Senior FCO what I had done wrong. His answer "you didn't do anything wrong, you just forgot to ask permission." The next day I received orders to be transferred away. Should have done something like that sooner. The orders sent me to the 306th BG at Thurleigh, and it was going from hell to heaven!

At Thurleigh it was just the opposite, not only did they accept the flying control concept, they insisted on it. Instead of doing next to nothing, you were required to keep a check on the weather, suggest to Operations the direction of take-off or landing, sometimes they would disagree with you, but you had to keep them advised. The 306th had a system of operational take-off that required the planes to get airborne in formation order. Perhaps some of the other groups had this same requirement. What this meant was that the FCO would go down to Operations pick up the aircraft numbers and their position in the formation, return to the tower and get down to work putting together the taxi plan. When I first started doing this early in 1944, the group was only putting up about 18 aircraft on any given mission. We would go to the general briefing and present this taxi plan orally to the pilots, by using a rather large map of the airfield. When the taxi briefing was over we continued the short briefing by pointing out the anticipated visibility, wind directions, any possible obstructions around the base, icing areas on the taxi-ways, etc., at time of take off.

Later when we went up to 36 or more aircraft per mission, we discontinued the oral taxi and take-off briefing. In its place we had a little map of the airfield printed with ample room for writing the individual aircraft taxi plans. We continued the oral briefing for wind, visibility, etc. It was amazing how well the taxi plan would work. The planes could be seen moving about the taxi track, stopping occasionally to let another craft out of dispersal then moving on. In the dark the red and green running lights could be seen with an occasional flick of landing lights to indicate a plane should come out of dispersal. Taking off in formation order, of course, made it considerably easier for the group to formate, and this also saved fuel for later on, a big plus.

We were also required to handle the various kinds of clearances for cross country flights, local flights (these were verbal), and RON's. Usually the squadron or group operations would call, give us the information needed, one of our people would make out the clearance in full (including visiting field call sign, weather at destination, etc.). Should there be any doubt as to the weather, the pilot could consult with the weather office also in the tower.

Flying Control had the natural duty to see that the airfield lighting systems were maintained and operated properly, the same for the base radio facilities. Normally the tower radios were supposed to have about a ten or fifteen mile range. Ours were a bit more powerful, many times I have held conversations with aircraft over the Wash - about 100 miles from base. One day a pilot friend of mine came back from a mission with a little piece of paper in his hand. He asked if we landed a certain aircraft at such and such time and gave me the call sign. Sure enough it was up on the "OPS" board. He was on the bombing run at Stetin when that occurred. Of course that was a freak known as skip distance.

Being a Flying Control Officer was a very interesting job, ~~being~~. Since the tower was in operation 24 hours a day, all personnel were excluded from extra duty. You got to know many of the pilots and navigators as friends. You took local flights with them so they would know you cared about the problems of flying aircraft over the British Isles. The air crews appreciated this and they knew we were always open for suggestions to improve the services rendered to them. Quite a few problems were solved down at the mess over a glass of scotch, rather than going through operations, I'm glad to say we had a very good relationship with the pilots. Many of those guys are friends of mine today.

Our biggest problem was the weather. When the weather was bad the aircraft would break formation at our buncher and return to the field on an individual basis. If this occurred, not only your airbase was returning one by one but so was everybody else in your neighborhood. It was not uncommon to see four or five different group tail markings in the traffic pattern. This led to wall to wall airplanes flying around in bad weather, a very difficult and, I am sure, quite scary for the air crews. Under these circumstances I can only congratulate the crews for superb air discipline.

When the weather was OK the group came back to the field in formation. One squadron at a time would leave the buncher on a prearranged schedule and approach the field in the direction of landing. Over the base six aircraft would peel out of formation and land, the remaining six doing a 360 degree turn coming back over the field and the also peeled off and landed. The peel off maneuver seemed to particularly please the pilots - probably made them feel a little like fighter pilots. As this second six planes peeled off, the next twelve was approaching and followed the same procedure. This action continued until the entire group had landed.

When the groups took off or landed at their base they were required

to follow prescribed corridors. I can see a resemblance of this in our American air traffic control system in use today with its use of the various airways. Or

One of the duties of the Flying Control Officers at Thurleigh was to brief new pilots and navigators on the RAF system of flying over and around the British airspace. We also had to let them know the various rules for operating at Thurleigh, and mostly they paid close attention to what we told them. We always talked to them near a map of the field so they could keep themselves oriented during our talks. I don't know what the other officers did but one of the things I pointed out was the rather large valley at the <sup>SW</sup> end of RW 24, this being the most used direction of take off. I suggested they take a look at that valley. I did this for the simple reason that should they lose an engine on take off they would know the ground was falling away from them and it was not necessary to try to climb with the possibility of a stall and crash. In the tower you could hear the engines fail as they made a take off run, in all probability before the pilots knew it. One day after we had started getting the unpainted planes, one of them started down RW 24 and ~~the~~ <sup>ONE</sup> engine started banging, engine failure. ~~Anyway~~ The aircraft continued its take off run and flew straight out over the valley and slowly went out-of-sight as it lost a little altitude. We waited, but there was no indication of a crash, no explosion, nothing. This was one of the pilots I had briefed on the use of that valley. It saved the <sup>CREW'S</sup> ~~one's~~ life and an airplane, I was very pleased at this turn of event. The only problem was the <sup>BOMBARDIER</sup> ~~bombardier~~ jettisoned his bombs in train and I don't think anyone ever found them. Later in the day I went down to the mess and <sup>SAW</sup> ~~see~~ the pilot and commented on his take off. He informed me that my valley is really beautiful when one gets a close view of it, he had remembered my briefing.

Okay folks, that's it.

(A question period followed)

THE PANIC ROOM - Training of a Flying Control Officer

I was one of the flying control officers (tower) for the 306th Bomb Grp. located at Thurleigh, England. To get this kind of duty one had to survive an extremely comprehensive and challenging four to five month course given by the RAF. The school I attended was <sup>located</sup> ~~at~~ an airfield called Watchfield (near Salisbury). The courses given were the practices and procedures of flying control, navigation, weather, communications and several other courses of lesser importance. <sup>The</sup> Subjects were taught in a no-nonsense classroom atmosphere. Practical applications were done by having students navigate old "Anson" bombers around England both day and night, you also made and used weather maps from data supplied by the weather people, etc. For the practical application of flying control the RAF had devised a mock control tower, into this tower they fed various and devious scenarios that we the students had to handle quickly and efficiently as possible.

Here's my story of my test in the "Panic Room". The time frame of this action was about 30 minutes - at the time it seemed like forever:

// For - - - - - START AT RED MARK ON PAGE 4  
OF SPEECH AND CONTINUE TO BOTTOM  
OF PAGE FIVE. - THIS STORY OF  
"PANIC ROOM" //

And so we went back to further classroom studies awaiting the dreaded final examinations. The written finals took over two days to complete. Most questions requiring a narrative answer with very few true and false answers. If you managed to survive these exams along with your panic room stint, you then faced an oral exam before a three officer board. Here you learned your fate, pass or failure. I was lucky and passed, only about half of the original group of 75 who <sup>took</sup> ~~were~~ the trip overseas made the grade. I do not recall hearing how I made out on any of the tests, only that I had satisfactorily passed the course and would receive a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant. I do know one thing, the "panic room" weighed heavily in the final results, we were <sup>now</sup> told that.