

# **Air Transport Auxiliary**

## **15th April 2008 - Roy Underdown Pavilion**

Peter Garrod spoke about the history of the Air Training Auxiliary, and his own personal experience.

With the threat of war, the British Government had made a decision to increase the production of aircraft. Additional factories were built across the country, and it was down to the ATA to ferry the aircraft from these factories to airfields across the country.

Peter had brought with him his “blue book” which contained essential information on each of the aircraft he was qualified to fly, a vital resource when, with very little training and short notice, typically 40 minutes, he would be expected to fly one of these aeroplanes. This task was performed, initially by trained pilots who were not eligible to fly in active service, because of age or disability.

Women were also recruited and trained to pilot these aircraft. At its peak, the ATA consisted of 1000 air crew of which 100 were female, and 100 were flight engineers.

Peter showed a picture of the first ATA control centre, a converted bus at White Waltham! Various airfields had an attachment of the ATA. Hamble was one of these, being run entirely by women. The ATA was the first unit of any size that enlisted girls to do the same job, with the same promotion prospects, at the same ranks and with the same pay as men.

Peter’s astigmatism prevented him from joining the RAF as a regular pilot in active service, but gave him the opportunity to be a ferry pilot for the ATA. He spoke of his training as he started flying Tiger Moths, and progressed to flying other single engine aircraft, learning how to dismantle and reassemble aircraft engines and fuel systems. He had the privilege of flying Hurricanes and Spitfires along with, up to 64 other single engine aircraft that he was qualified to fly.

Peter spoke of the Spitfire as having a remarkable personality, and not a perfect flying machine. It had appalling visibility from the cockpit when on the ground, resulting in the pilot having to weave left and right while taxiing.

Peter progressed to fly up to 46 variations of twin-engine aircraft, and spoke fondly of the Vickers Wellington. It was a twin-engine bomber designed in the mid 1930s. It used a unique basket-like structure known as a geodetic construction, which gave the plane tremendous strength and flexibility.

Peter gave a couple of memorable recollections from his hours spent training on the various aircraft. In one, after performing various manoeuvres including stall turns, and spins, one instructor spoke of Peter as having a “budding aerobatic pilot trying to get out”. In another incident, when landing, the

undercarriage warning horn came on, indicating a possible problem with the undercarriage. As the plane was only 10ft off the ground, his instructor calmly told him that he had better “give her some gas”!

King George VI visited White Waltham while Peter was there. The King was being given a tour of the ops room which had a panoramic view over the airfield. An earlier incident on the airfield had resulted in an aircraft having tipped up on landing. Peter told of how he managed to obscure the King’s view by carefully positioning himself between the King and this embarrassing sight.

A revealing and entertaining insight was given by Peter to the work carried out by the ATA during the Second World War, and the ATA pilot’s important role in ferrying aircraft across the country.

Also see 'Hamble Articles' menu - ATA at Hamble