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INDIA

My voyage to India took as far as I can remember, 4 weeks, we had to travel some distance west out into the Atlantic because of the U-Boat risk before turning east and eventually entering the Mediterranean passing Gibraltar, Malta eventually arriving at Port Said for the trip through the Suez Canal.

I had not realised the immensity of the seas until we entered the Indian Ocean and sailed for days without seeing land, luckily the Captain knew the way and we arrived safely at Bombay, now Mumbai.

After disembarking and waiting on the quayside I was staggered to see that the Flight Sergeant in charge who was waiting for us, was none other than my great cousin Norman Sully, who had been in the RAF for some time, after both of us getting over the surprise he took me, and only me, to the stores where all my KD (Khaki Drill) clothes were exchanged for Indian made ones, normal shirt style instead of a Uniform jacket made out of cotton, complete with belt and shorts that now exposed my knees.

My posting from Bombay was to Rawalpindi way up in the north of India in the Punjab, a journey that entailed a train journey of some three or four days, extremely hot, third class wooden seats, but we made it to the RAF base at Chaklala. This was a training station for Army parachutists, flying DC.3's, Dakotas. I flew a number of times, usually on Test flights, as I was involved in the servicing of the Dakotas.

After having been at Chaklala for a while a message was received from our satellite station at Srinagar in Kashmir, that an electrician was required to install a new mains generator for the station, and I think because I was the most recent arrival on the station I drew the short straw, although I had only been involved in training with aircraft voltage, 24 volts.

After a long ride in the back of a truck I arrived at Srinagar in Kashmir, a most beautiful country the snow-capped Himalayas to the north, the lakes, with the houseboats, around us, almost magical, and we were billeted by Lake Dal in a grand house, which had been taken over by the R.A.F. waited on by bearers (servants) who enquired each day "how would you like your eggs cooked this morning, Sahib?" as you came down for breakfast.

The job of connecting the Generator I think took me a week, but I thought that as they were daft enough to send me there I would make it last, a most enjoyable six week experience.

Back at Chak I also made a parachute jump, reasonably safe as the chute was opened by an attached static line, the system the army uses to keep troops close together for landing, quite an exhilarating experience.

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It was at 'Chak' that I met Bob Dowdeswell with whom I became good friends, a friendship that has lasted for over 60 years, his children and ours are also good friends, his family matching ours very closely in age, and visiting each other as families quite frequently when younger, they living in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.

Also whilst at 'Chak' Norman Sully, who I met at Bombay came up to 'Pindi' and we spent some leave together at the Church Army Rest Home, not too far away, and it was whilst we were there that the day of the Partition of India occurred, when Hindus and Moslems who had lived together for years in harmony during the British Raj, suddenly became enemies and when we saw dead bodies outside of the building we decided it would be wise to return to camp, which was now in Pakistan and not in India as it was when we left.

There had been changes at Chaklala as the Indian Air force had taken over and the parachute training programme ended, I then became attached to the M.T Section (Motor Transport) and became the Despatch Rider for the British section complete with a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The duty that I remember most on the Harley was taking a Packet from camp to Peshawar, a town in the North West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan, a distance of about 100 miles, through quite barren scenery.

Another trip that I well remember is driving an RAF Truck in convoy, some of the station supplies not destined for the Indian Air Force, to Delhi, which entailed crossing part of the Sind Desert, water carriers tied to the front of the vehicles to keep cool, a distance, which my computer tells me, was 419.9 miles, again a hot journey.

One of my more unpleasant memories is being involved with a team going to the crash site of one of our Dakotas, most on board were killed and it meant transporting the dead and injured some considerable way down the hillside, or as the hills around us were known 'the Kuhds'.

Eventually the time came and I was posted home, Bob had left a while before as he became quite unwell and was posted home because of this, I remember when I visited Bob in Hospital, him saying that he was going home in a few days and had not had chance to get to the markets for some souvenirs and would I get some for him to take home. In spite of being close friends and knowing that he came from Cheltenham and I from Sussex, we foolishly had not exchanged actual addresses.

My Journey home entailed the train journey back to Bombay where we boarded the RMS 'Orion' of the Orient Line, sounds rather grand but it was still a troopship, we eventually arrived at Liverpool, disembarked, and then home on leave.