

John H. HARRISON

John was born in Sale, Cheshire, England in 1923. Before the outbreak of WW II, he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF) as an Aircraft Apprentice. This constituted a rather long-term (14 year) commitment to the RAF. His trade was to be "Instrument Maker". When his training was finished in June, 1941, John served on Coastal Command 206 Squadron in Northern Ireland and the Outer Hebrides. He was then posted "overseas" in September, 1942.

John served with Coastal Command 262 Squadron flying Catalinas out of Durban harbour, South Africa escorting convoys around "the Cape". In May, 1944, he was invalided back to the United Kingdom, however, he was held in Kasfareet, Egypt for two months awaiting a hospital ship back home. His memory of D-Day (June 6th, 1944) was "lying in a 'hospital' in Egypt with the only radio on our unit -- suddenly so many friends to visit me."



From 1944 until August, 1945, John served on the Maintenance Unit at Chester, England. For the following two years he served on the continent; first with 105 Staging Post in Evere, Belgium and then on the Maintenance Unit in Hamburg, Germany. His next postings were with # 611 and # 14 squadrons (the latter based in Cologne, Germany). Then it was back to his "roots", this time as an instructor, at # 1, Apprentice School from January, 1950 to May, 1953

when he received his honourable discharge from the RAF. During this latter period he married Kathleen (September, 1950).

From then until July, 1957 John worked as an Electronics Design Engineer with Air Trainers in Buckinghamshire. Then came the big change: John emigrated to Canada where he took up a position as a Production Engineer at Computing Devices. His wife and family followed him to Canada in November. In August, 1961 he became an instructor with the Eastern Ontario Institute of Technology (now Algonquin College). He taught there until he retired in September, 1985. In 1967, John and his family became Canadian citizens.

John summarizes his outstanding memories in a series of one-liners -- leaving the reader to fill in the picture:

- Trying to get a pub visit as an apprentice! [good luck];
- Watching the London Blitz from the hills northwest of London;
- The look on my Mother's and sister's faces when the sirens went for the air raid on Manchester (December 20, 21 and 22, 1941);
- Trying to get home from the Outer Hebrides for my sister's wedding in less than 24 hours;
- Watching friends leave on convoy patrol -- never to be seen again;
- My stay in hospital in South Africa with the wounded from El Alamein and Egypt (51st Division) and being moved by the fantastic and uplifting spirit of those men with broken bodies. You just could not feel sorry for yourself;
- Being stopped on the hospital ship by a submarine in the Indian Ocean;
- The devastation as we entered Germany -- areas of rubble as far as the eye could see;
- The fact that I only met one German (an honest man) who served on the Western Front;
- VE-Day -- cycling 40 miles to be with my parents and sisters and go to the celebrations at home that night!. Trying to cycle back the next day!!;
- Being saluted in Berlin on November 11th, 1949 (during the Berlin Blockade) by Russian soldiers -- because we were wearing a red poppy!"



John was a long-time resident of Richmond, a Charter Member and Life Member of Branch 625, and an effective worker for community projects. In 1988 he was instrumental in the completion of the cenotaph for the Richmond Memorial Park where the annual November 11 ceremony has been held ever since. John ensured the cenotaph and its gardens were well cared for and from his hospital bed he recruited someone to take over the cenotaph committee for the branch.

In the summer of 2010 John was diagnosed with ALS and died on December 1, 2010. He leaves behind his wife of 60 years, Kay and daughter Carole, son Peter and grandchildren Amanda, David, Jennifer and Stephanie.