

W.O. George E. Read



On 4th September 1939, three months short of his 19th birthday, my father George Read joined a queue of men and boys in Manchester Town Hall. He did not know what fate had in store for him, but he was determined to do his duty for his country. He was assigned to the Volunteer Reserve and immediately sent for initial training.

Over a year later, George was still on the reserve list. The British Army had been evacuated from Dunkirk and a new front line was being prepared in the skies. George was reassigned to the RAF and a new training regime at Ringway south of the city. As an apprentice engineer George thought he would be joining the maintenance crews. But he had demonstrated an aptitude for spatial problem solving and was instead assigned to Navigator training.

Early in 1942, George began his first tour of active duty in 613 Mosquito Squadron. The “mossie” as it was affectionately known was light and fast being mostly made from wood. The cramped cockpit only just had room for the two-man crew. Missions mainly involved high level bombing of industrial targets. There were nearly always casualties and George saw many friends perish under enemy gunfire. When George and his officer pilot had to ditch their plane just off the North Sea coast it took them two days to get back to base. As they swaggered into the billet, the squadron, having given them up for dead, were sharing out their gear. After that episode George was reckoned to be somehow invincible. The other flyers wanted to know his secret and decided that a photograph of George’s niece, which he kept in his battledress breast pocket must be a protective charm. Thereafter, before each mission, the squadron would line up to touch the photograph.

George went on to fly, and survive, four full tours of bombing duty – the maximum that was allowed. For the final months of the war he flew reconnaissance and weather missions, including in the hours before the Normandy Landings.

He would have been leading the party celebrations on VE Day and no doubt emerged with a huge hangover. He was soon de-mobbed from active duty along with the thousands of other war recruits, but he re-joined the RAF as a career serviceman the next day. He finally retired from the RAF in January 1976.