

Typhoon Stories by Ken Trott

Kenneth Trott was born in Ilford, London, England on the 28th of December 1922. He volunteered for the RAF in April 1941, age 18 and joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve in September 1941 as a Trainee Cadet Pilot. During his training, he held the rank of Leading Aircraftsman. He did his initial training on ground subjects at Torquay, Devon, England, before being posted overseas to Canada for Flying Training. He served in the New Forest as Typhoon pilot and these are his personal accounts of those times.

The Road to D-Day

I went solo at Windsor Mills Airfield near Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada flying Fleet Finch Biplanes. Later I was posted to St. Hubert, Montreal, for advanced flying on North American AT. 6 Trainer. In September of 1942, I received my pilots' wings and

was also commissioned as a pilot officer. I was finally demobilised in November 1946 in the substantive rank of Flight Lieutenant.

On my return to England in October 1942, I was posted firstly to Peterborough, flying Masters, and in early 1943 to Millfield, near Berwick on Tweed in Northumberland to fly Hawker Hurricanes.

I was then posted to 195 Squadron in April 1943, which was stationed at Woodvale Airfield near Southport, Cheshire and equipped with Typhoon single seat fighters. Soon after, the squadron was moved to Norfolk, where I spent several months doing operation patrols over the North Sea and Holland.

In September, my squadron was again moved, this time to Fairlop airfield in Essex, just outside London. We then carried out operations over France, often flying down to Manston Airfield in Kent for briefing. In early 1944, 195 Squadron was disbanded and I moved to 197 Squadron stationed at Tangmere airfield in west Sussex on the south coast of England. The Typhoons were then equipped with bomb racks under each wing to take 500- or 1000-pound bombs. Our main operational work was attacking radar and V-I sites, as well as being on escort and standby duties.

In April, we moved to Needs Oar Point near the Beaulieu River overlooking the Solent & Isle of Wight and became part of the 2nd Tactical Air Force. 197 Squadron, along with numbers 257, 266, and 193, then became known as 146 Wing, all operating from the same airfield in preparation for D-Day.

In May 1944, we were constantly called upon to make attacks against radar targets along the coast of France, as well as the V-I sites. I have no entry in my flying logbook for the 2nd or 4th of June. This may have been due to the bad weather that we had about that time.

On the 3rd of June, we made a high-level dive-bombing attack on the radar site at Cap D' Antifer, not far from Le Havre, France. This involved our crossing over the French Coast, high enough to avoid the light flak, and then turning 180 degrees in a dive-bombing attack on the German radar sites with a final burst of our cannon fire before leveling out over the sea at approximately five hundred knots. Then forming up in sections of four in battle formation for our return home. Total flying time was 1 hour, 15 minutes. Later in the day, orders were received to paint the broad black and white invasion stripes on the wings and fuselage of our Typhoons, hopefully to identify friend from foe, both in the air and on the ground. Needless to say, a lot of paint was splashed around, by both pilots and ground crew, and a great sense of anticipation was felt by everyone.

On the 5th of June, I started off by air testing one of our new Typhoons, which had just been delivered. This was one of the first four bladed types which had begun to arrive on the Squadron. In the evening of D-Day - 1, we carried out another operation over the French Coast. I noted in my logbook "large convoys of LCRs seen heading toward Cherbourg." In fact, the Channel was covered with boats of various kinds, a fantastic sight and it seemed impossible that the Germans did not know what we were up to. On our return to Needs Oar Point Airfield, England, all squadron pilots were told to attend a large mess tent where a covered blackboard was set up. We were then informed by the senior officer present that tomorrow, the 6th of June, would be D-Day. The blackboard was then unveiled to reveal the proposed landings, etc. We were told to turn in early, as we should be on call from approximately 4 a.m. the next morning. Needless to say, the roar of aircraft going overhead towards France made sleep almost impossible in our tents.

We all took an early breakfast and reported to our various dispersals, where the ground crew were already running up the Sabre engines of our Typhoons and then refuelling them while we awaited the first calls to briefing and also listened to the BBC radio broadcasts. My squadron, 197 was first involved at 0710, eight aircraft being led by Wing Commander Baker, who later lost his life over Normandy on the 16th of June. They attacked targets in a low-level attack south of Bayeux and all returned safely at 0820.

As soon as the aircraft from the first operation of the day had landed and taxied in, they were surrounded by both ground crew and the other pilots on standby, who were checking firstly to see if the muzzle (the mouth of the cannon) covers had been blown off (which would indicate that each of the four 20mm cannons had been fired) and then if there was any flak damage to the aircraft. As soon as the pilots had climbed down, we all wanted to know what it was like over the beachhead. "Any enemy aircraft seen? How much flak? The weather conditions. What targets had been attacked?"

Meanwhile, the Squadron Intelligence Officer was hovering around, wanting to speak to each pilot who had taken part in this, our first operation of D-Day. Having slung their parachutes over their shoulders, many walked away to light a cigarette before giving way to the countless questions still coming from all sides. The aircraft were now

surrounded by the ground crews, busy re fuelling and re-arming to get them ready as soon as possible for the next operation. I was not involved in the first operation of the day but was requested later in the morning to fly the Wing Intelligence Officer to a meeting at Thorney Airfield Island, using the Auster Aircraft.

This was a pre-war airfield, not far from Portsmouth, England and while waiting, I observed a great deal of aerial activity, Typhoons on standby, and light bombers overhead from airfields further away.

On my return to Needs Oar Point, I remained on call until 1750 hours when eight of us were briefed to carry out a reconnaissance south of Caen. My logbook indicates that this involved low level bombing on an emergency supply dump, which was left with black smoke, and flames coming from the target area.

We all returned at 1920. The third operation by my squadron took off at 2105, this time led by our commanding officer, Squadron Leader Taylor. Again, eight aircraft were involved, the operation being an armed reconnaissance in the Caen and Bayeux area.

They landed back at 2215, and so ended D-Day. From D-Day + 1, we continued at standby until called upon to provide close support to the Canadian Army, as well as specialist operations on selected targets. 146 wing only lost one pilot that day, although my best friend failed to return from an operation in the area of St. Lo, the following day and was later reported killed in action.

In all, during the ten weeks of the Battle of Normandy, 150 Typhoon pilots lost their lives, while many others were taken prisoners of war, me included. To commemorate this battle, and in particular the part the Typhoon played, a memorial has been erected near the village of Noyers-Bocage (France) about ten miles southwest of Caen.