

## **Eric Evans 1924-2020. Royal Air Force Llanelli & Swansea**

West Wales Veterans' Archive, National Library of Wales

Date of interview: 19.11.19. Llanelli

### **Description**

Eric Evans was born in the Neath Valley in 1924, before the family moved to Ammanford. Inspired by a talk given at school in Ammanford, Eric joined the Miles Aircraft Factory near Reading to work on the aircraft production line. After volunteering for aircrew duties with the RAF in 1942, he was posted to Canada to train as a Bomb-Aimer under the British and Commonwealth Air Training Plan. In 1944 Eric joined 99 Squadron in India which was equipped with the Consolidator B.24 Liberator, personally flying many operational bombing sorties during the Burma campaign. Shortly before the end of his operational tour, Eric's aircraft was shot down and he was badly injured. Eric spent the remainder of the war recovering from his injuries. Post-war Eric became a jeweller and watch repairer in Swansea.

### **Early Life**

Eric Evans was born on 24.7.1924 in Banwen, in the Neath Valley. Aged 7yrs Eric's parents moved the family to Briton Ferry and within one year his uncle had been killed in a mining accident nearby. The family moved soon after to Penygroes and then to Ammanford both in Carmarthenshire. Inspired by a talk given by a visiting speaker to his school on the war effort, Eric and a school friend decided to leave school aged just 15yrs to join the war effort themselves. Too young to enlist in the Armed Forces, they got jobs on the production line with the Miles Aircraft Factory in Woodley, near Reading. The Miles Aircraft Factory produced several thousand training and target towing aircraft for the RAF during WW2, including the elementary trainer Magister, advanced trainer Master 1 and 11 and the target-towing Martinet. This experience sparked Eric's interest in flying which eventually led to him joining the RAF. In 1942 he volunteered for the Royal Air Force. During this period, Eric's parents had again moved, from Ammanford to Llanelli.

### **Initial RAF Aircrew Training**

Eric was sent to Oxford to undertake three days of medical and academic examinations and was selected for aircrew training. He was then posted to Saskatchewan in Western Canada for four training as a Bomb-Aimer, followed by a navigation course in Winnipeg, which meant that he could be used as a 'back-up' should a crew's navigator be injured and unable to function on an operational sortie. After successfully completing the course Eric was sent on a long-range bombing course flying the twin-engine B.25 'Mitchells' from Boundary Bay situated on the coast along the border between Canada and the USA. He then elected to go onto heavy bombers and the four-engine B.24 'Liberators'.

Sent home across the Atlantic and followed by a short period of leave, Eric discovered that he had received a posting to the Far East to join 99 Squadron, a B.24 Squadron.

### **Operational Tour in the Far East**

99 Squadron was stationed in RAF Dhubalia, Bengal, India and was actively involved in the Burma campaign. Eric received a promotion from Flight Sergeant to Warrant Officer during this period. He recalled some of the operational sorties he flew on were bombing missions to provide close support to the 14<sup>th</sup> Army and move *'big guns'* from one location to another for them.

Shortly before completing his operational tour of 30 bombing sorties, he flew on an operational mission attacking Japanese oil tankers out at sea. Eric's aircraft which had been flying at just 55ft above the waves was hit by anti-aircraft fire and badly damaged. The pilot managed to keep the aircraft above sea level and crossed over land setting a course for Burma. After a while, the pilot could no longer keep the aircraft flying and it dived straight into the ground. Eric recalls being *'belted around a bit'*, when in-fact he was severely injured, recovered from the aircraft, and spent some months in hospital. He was then permanently moved from flying duties, before being discharged from the RAF and, as he described, *'one third of my body didn't work'*.

### **Post-War**

Eric returned to his family in Llanelli and with an uncle who ran a jeweller's shop in Swansea he went to work for him, whereupon he developed an expertise in watch repairing. In the immediate post-war years and together with another former RAF veteran, Eric approached the RAF Benevolent Fund to apply for a grant to help them to set up a watch-repair business. They believed themselves to be deserving cases, but the Benevolent Fund clearly did not and turned them down. Disappointed but undeterred Eric eventually did set up his own watch repairing business which he continued to successfully manage for the rest of his career. Eric married and together with his wife brought up their family. Latterly, he lived in Llanelli and was affected by the severe physical injuries he received during WW2 for the rest of his life.

Sadly, Eric Evans passed away on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2020.