

CHAPTER II

Cranwell 1926-27

Although closely associated with flying, only 70-80 hours spread over two years was done by each cadet at Cranwell. At the flying training schools of which there were four, the same number of hours were flown by each pupil in one year. It was made known to us cadets that flying aeroplanes was not the be-all and end-all of our presence there, so we were expected to acquire a working knowledge of the sciences, the Arts, history, etc. We were also encouraged to take part in the many sports for which excellent facilities were provided. Indeed our teams had an enviable record of successes in our matches particularly when we beat both the 'Shop' and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst at rugby, the most prestigious game of all.

The average cadet, and I include myself, could not compete with Frank Whittle in Science and Mathematics, nor with Douglas Bader in the field of sport. These are just two who lived to become famous, but there were several others who, had they survived, could have contributed to mankind. I name Reggie Elsmie, Pussy Shelley, Red Scarlett and Guy Charles in this category. Also, a contemporary and close friend, was Teddy Hudleston whose meteoric career from Pilot Officer to Air Chief Marshal should go into the Guinness Book of Records. He was a true scholar/athlete and he did survive. But these were the top names in learning and in sport, whereas I was an average cadet and did not wear the colourful blazer which identified the sportsman who excelled, or go into the class-room carrying a learned thesis under my arm which identified a scholar. So I became instead 'The Garage Rat'.

Every cadet was encouraged, in fact expected to have a motor bicycle, and motor cars were not permitted. If you did not have a motor bike of your own, you would be issued with one from the pool which was kept for cadets in a hangar. These were P & Ms having been used by dispatch riders during the 1914-18 war of which there must have been a large surplus. They were not very reliable, although legend claims that one cadet rode his to London and back during a weekend. The most

the average cadet could do with his P & M was about twelve miles, after which it became hotter and hotter and he would have to stop riding for half an hour to let it cool down. I was fortunate and had my own motor bike but in my last term I decided that I would prefer a motor car which was not allowed.

So I said to myself, why not buy a motor bicycle and sidecar and convert it so that you drove the combination from the sidecar where you could wrap up nice and warm, and not be exposed to the elements? I bought an old AJS twin cylinder and a sidecar which didn't cost very much, but there was the big task ahead in doing the conversion. Fortunately I had the use of the cadets' workshop where we were instructed in practical engineering. This was kept open for any engineering project that any cadet had in mind. I made full use of this facility and by means of lots of 'Emmet' and 'Heath Robinson' equipment, spindles, bowden cables, rods, etc., I managed to get the full control of the combination into the sidecar, steering wheel, throttle, brakes and gears — and it worked. The difficulty was that the gear box was faulty. This had nothing to do with my conversion, but I didn't have enough money to get a new gearbox; in fact the machine was so old that I doubt whether one existed. I did manage to drive, from the sidecar, down local roads and I went to Digby once where my elder brother was an officer, which is about ten or fifteen miles away. I called the combination Boanerges, which attracted a great deal of attention, especially on local roads, where one seldom met motor cars in those days. However, when someone saw this combination, without a driver on the motor bike, it made him wonder how much alcohol he had consumed that day!