DIARY OF A W.A.G.

MEMOIRS OF WW2 WIRELESS AIR GUNNER

HARRY BRABIN

New revelations from an Aussie inside the RAF bomber command during World War 2.

Personal insights of life and love from one who survived 45 bombing missions.

DIARY OF A W.A.G.

(WIRELESS AIR GUNNER)

25.04.1942 - 08.05.1945

BY

WARRANT OFFICER

HAROLD BRABIN

FOUR GROUP

102 (CEYLON) SQUADRON

POCKLINGTON

YORKSHIRE

Such shining faces such golden hair.
The glow of youth still on them,
They are so fresh and fair.

Such winning graces. So free from care.
And nothing can upset them,
They die just for a dare.

Flying to distant places unaware,
That death is waiting for them,
Is more than I can bear.

Why does youth so freely give,
All life, all love, all joy,
When they could so easily live?

Harold Brabin

Warrant Officer Harold Brabin

Acknowledgments

The idea to update my previous memoir of my experiences in bomber command during the Second World War came to me when I received from my bomb aimer Don McLean his diary, to this I added my own. He also gave me a copy of our pilot's diary. Sadly, Bill Rabbitt who lived in Penola South Australia has passed on.

Christine Johnson, who lives in Wales and whose father was in the Wing Commander's crew, sent me a photograph of that crew and some further information gathered by her son, David.

Recently Don McLean organised a reunion in Brisbane for Bas Spiller (navigator) and Sandy Concannon (rear gunner) together with Bill Rabbitt's son Michael, and there I obtained some further anecdotes. I want to thank Don and his family for their hospitality.

I have included a number of poems that I have written since I have joined GeoffreyFalkenmire's Poetry class at Dee Why Seniors.

Lyall McNeish has been my tutor at Computer Pals and has now made me a trainee tutor. He has been a great help in editing and producing this diary and designing the front cover.

Many thanks to Greg Robison for redoing the design and improving the photographs and the general layout.

Tom Wingham who is the secretary of the 102 Squadron Association in the U.K. sends us a newsletter keeping us up-to-date, and includes stories about exploits retold by our squadron members, and has also organised an Annual Reunion each year in Pocklington.

I feel privileged to have been in one of the few Australian crews that operated on "D" Day and to have seen the whole operation from the air.

Harold William Brabin 422113
Unit 4 69 Evans Street.
Freshwater NSW Australia

I was walking quickly along Sydney's Castlereagh St. on a brisk winter's day, returning from my lunch break, when I decided to join the Air Force. This was in June 1941.

I lived in Manly and travelled six days a week on a ferry across seven miles of one of the most beautiful harbours in the world to work. Apart from Saturday mornings I also worked late on Thursday nights, so that I was pretty tired by the time the weekend came around.

I was eighteen years of age and worked in the general literature section at Angus & Robertson's bookshop. I met many of the authors that came in to see Mr. Cousins the Managing Director such as Ion (Jack) Idriess and Jack Moses who wrote "Nine miles From Gundagai" and other poems. I also met Henrietta Drake- Brockman who had come over from Perth, she had written "Younger Sons". I sold books such as Gunther's "Inside Europe" and others that were critical of the way War Reparations were made against the Germany after the First World War. These reparations caused very high inflation and made many starve. Hitler gave them some hope, but he went too far and invaded the smaller countries on their borders. So I thought that I had better get involved. Many boys of my age were already in uniform and I decided to join up myself. It seemed most of my friends were joining the forces. One of the young girls who worked in the accounts section said that she would go out with me when I was in uniform. I kept her to her word.

I visited a friend, Bill Hooker, who was in the army and stationed at St. Ives Showground. I was not impressed with life in the Army, mainly because of the dust, flies and ants, the hard beds, and the heat. It did not appeal to me at all. Neither did the prospect of being confined in the bowels of a ship, below the waterline, next to iron bulkheads. Especially remembering that the HMAS Sydney had been sunk with 645 of its crew on board. So I joined the Air Force where they had sheets on the beds and the uniform was more to my taste. There was no doubt in my mind that I had made the right choice. The Army lads referred to us as the "Brylcream Boys" and did not like the way girls gave us preference.

As a child I watched small single engine planes flying overhead until they were lost in the distance. I was greatly intrigued by the thought of flying.

I decided to try to qualify for aircrew and went along to the recruiting depot. Squadron Leader Coleman, (Ronald's brother), said that I should attend Shore Grammar School to bring my mathematics level up to the right standard. I took his advice and went to night classes for three months. My aim was to become a Wireless Air Gunner. A W.A.G. I learned was the fellow who sent and received communications in the aircraft. As a W.A.G., I needed to learn radio, astronavigation and communications. Fortunately, I had already learned Morse code when I was in the Boy Scouts but I had to work at getting my speed up to scratch. I went to classes at night at Mrs.Mack's school at 34 Clarence Street, Sydney where

volunteer young girls helped us to increase our sending and receiving speed. I began at the beginner's table and gradually progressed from table to table until I could do about sixteen words a minute.

I also enrolled at the Radio College in George Street, near Broadway, where I learned radio theory. After nine months of working during the day and doing these courses at night I was at last called up on Anzac Day (25th April) 1942. I was quite excited, as I had waited so long to be called up. There were boys my age from the country towns that were staggered at the size of Sydney. There were thirty-two of us who finally made the cut. There were quite a few who did not.

The medical examination at Woolloomooloo took some time to complete. The lung capacity test required that I blow up a column of mercury; the eye test included colour blindness tests and we had many other tests before we were passed as 'healthy'. It was a big surprise to me that so many boys my age had flat feet or were colour-blind or were not accepted for other reasons. There were a number who were overweight or too short or too tall. Some had not enough education. Most of us were of English descent and played cricket or football and were reasonably fit.

At last I was being transported on the back of a truck with other successful applicants to Bradfield Park, about two kilometres west of Lindfield on Sydney's North Shore. I made friends with a young man named Robin Odell who worked as an announcer on a young people's programme with Joy Nichols on radio station 2UW. He was later to be killed in action. We were issued with uniforms and had a white flash to wear in our forage caps to denote that we were trainee aircrew.

We were met at Bradfield by a sergeant who marched us around to be equipped with uniforms etc. He told us that we were '27 Course' and that the first two numbers of our Air Force number were 42 denoting the year we joined up. We wore navy-blue overalls and berets during training. We did a lot of marching, cross country running, and exercises. We learned mathematics, especially as it related to navigation, and aircraft recognition. They had small model aircraft hanging up and they showed us slides of many German aircraft as well as our own. We continued to practice Morse code, and had lectures on Air Force law. The part that stuck was "Acting contrary to good order and discipline" which covered a multitude of sins. One of our platoon, Joe Clarke, was elected platoon leader. He was well built and an A-Grade tennis player good looking and very popular. He decided to remain in Australia and train as a pilot, but sadly, he walked into a propeller and was killed while still training.

Our drill sergeant was mild in comparison to another Platoon whose sergeant was nicknamed " The screaming scull". The transformation from civilian life to Air Force discipline was a rude shock to the system but we all managed to cope. Some of the recruits had trouble getting up in the morning after so much exercise but Joe made them as we all suffered if one of us was doing the wrong thing.

The discipline during the course was rigid. We had to fold up our blankets and place them around the three biscuits, which were futon-like straw filled mattresses that were hard but made for a serviceable bed. Then we had to line the beds up. The floor had to be spotless and all of our gear neatly stowed away. We were expected to have a bright shine on our shoes, which was quite difficult to do on the shoes that were issued to us. Some of the boy's fathers had passed on the secrets that they had learned in the First World War so we all managed to do this in varying degrees. Often we had kit inspections with all that we owned

laid out for the duty officer and a sergeant to inspect. We were not allowed to have cameras however some of the cadets managed to have one when we left Australia. I wish that I had been one of them.

27 Course, Bradfield Park
Joe Clark is standing, top left. I am fourth from the left, in the front row.

We were given embarkation leave, and, as my mother was visiting her parents in Upwey in Victoria, I was given a rail pass so I could go down to see her. Soon after I arrived in Melbourne I met my mother by chance in Collins Street, she was also visiting the city. We were then able to go together to Upwey for a few days. I had lived in Upwey when I was little and had returned to visit my grandparents several times so I knew most of the tracks through the ferny gullies. Often the tracks followed small streams that had little waterfalls every so often. Some of the trees were huge; one I remember had a hole in the base that you could drive a sulky through. I remember climbing up O'Brien's lookout and being able to see Frankston on the Bay in the distance.

It was fortunate that I had this opportunity as my grandfather died shortly afterwards at ninety years of age. He was an accountant who had come out from England and married his English wife whose husband and children had died. He used to go for long walks in the nearby forest every day and played chess with friends frequently, so he was quite fit and alert right up to the end. I was also able to visit my uncle Will who had been in the First World War. He had been gassed and was not able to resume his trade as a plumber because of the damage to his lungs. He became a linesman for the Electricity Commission.

During our time at Bradfield three Japanese submarines had entered the Sydney Harbour when the boom gates had been opened to allow a ship to pass through. They torpedoed a ferry and shelled some houses in the Eastern Suburbs. There were several warships in the harbour, some of them American. It is a wonder that they did not do more damage as they

had the advantage of surprise. We were made to get out of bed and sent down to the bush for safety. It was dark cold and uncomfortable and the bushes were prickly.

Some time later, I was selected to play rugby against a local Grammar school and was surprised at the size of their players. We won but only just.

After six weeks we could volunteer to be trained in Canada or remain in Australia. Along with the more adventurous of us, I chose Canada. We sailed there in a Dutch ship, "The SS Johan Van Barneve", sharing cabins with twenty or so others. One of the airmen was a piano accordionist and he played the darn thing at every opportunity. This put me off accordions forever. To avoid enemy submarines, we headed on a course below New Zealand, toward South America. We were made to take turns on deck in the middle of the night to man the Browning machine guns, which were our only protection. It was bitterly cold and pitch black, the chances of seeing another ship or submarine was pretty slight. Any damage a Browning could do was negligible. We finally reached a point south of San Francisco without seeing any signs of the enemy and steamed north until we reached it.

San Francisco was quite a surprise. Geoff Boland and I made our way up from the dock to Market Street, where we were picked up by a couple of girls in a convertible. They said, "Hop in Aussies". They showed us around the city and took us over to Oakland across the Golden Gate Bridge. We went to a restaurant in the Fishermen's Wharf area. The restaurant had a large open fire in the centre of it. We then drove to an indoor heated pool for a swim. This was a first for me. Then we went bowling and the girls took us home to have dinner with their parents. Their father worked in a shipbuilding yard. He was also a collector of guns, which he kept in a secure room. He opened it up and proudly showed us his collection. We were surprised to see the cable tram that went up a very steep hill off Market Street. When it reached the top the driver and conductor got out and swung the tram around until it pointed the other way. We had quite a good view from up there. Afterwards the girls drove us back to the boat. What a day after so many days on board ship!

After two days in San Francisco, we boarded a train for Vancouver, travelling along the shore most of the way. The beaches, which were very narrow and stony, were not a patch on those we were used to back home. At Vancouver we were handed over to the Canadian sergeants who were to be in charge of us until we reached Edmonton. The Australian Officer and the two sergeants then returned to Australia. The Canadian sergeant said, "How about getting into line, fellas eh?" We were amazed at this after the shouting we had suffered from our own sergeants. We were taken over to Victoria Island by ferry; the beaches were strewn with logs, which were great windbreakers and good to sit on.

We then went by train on an amazing trip across the Rockies. The views were stunning; we had never seen anything as grand back home.

We arrived at Edmonton and were given leave and Geoff Boland and I went down town to a bowling alley and watched the bowlers. Bowling had not reached Australia so it was quite new to us. We were surprised at its popularity. I suppose in a town like Edmonton where it was freezing for so much of the year it was a wonderful indoor sport that all ages could participate in. We were quite happy to just sit and watch, as it was so cold outside and so warm in the bowling alley. We had not been there for very long before a Canadian girl picked us up. She had been at a friend's home earlier and the friend had jokingly said as she left, "Bring us back a couple of Aussies." So she did. Weren't they surprised? They made us very welcome.

Mr Eddie Schuck, their father, was in the Air Force down east and Mrs Schuck was about thirty-eight years of age and nearly as attractive as her sixteen and eighteen year old daughters, Edie and Dorothy. She took me into her bedroom to show me her wedding photos and kissed me in a fashion that I had not before experienced. What marvellous things I was learning. I had a studio photo taken at my mother's request and they asked for a copy. They had it framed and placed on their piano. Much later in England another Australian told me he had seen my photo in their home. We must have started something, as he said that they had entertained a number of Australians after we had left. It was strange that we should be going off to fight the Germans when this family were of German descent. There were large areas in Alberta where different immigrants had come to a generation previously to farm. The Poles, Germans and other people had taken advantage of the cheap land to settle there. The climate was a little colder than it had been in Europe but they managed quite well.

Eadie Schuck & Harry Brabin in Edmonton

The Americans had started to build a road to Alaska, and then the got going more quickly after they entered the war. They were building it over frozen ground and over rivers and through mountains at the rate of about twenty miles an hour. They had huge machinery that levelled and graded the road and laid the surface. While the drivers sat in enclosed cabins which were heated. Such a contrast to the way we built roads back in Australia.

There were a great many oil wells in this area. This made it a thriving city, as it was not dependent on farming alone to make it prosper.

Next, we were posted to Calgary for a Wireless Course. This course took nine months to complete. The school was on a hill east of the town and you could get a streetcar downtown. It had been a college and was housed in a beautiful three-story building. We slept in two-storey huts that were double glazed and heated. This was fortunate as the temperatures sometimes fell to forty below zero. Often the snow was some feet deep and icicles formed on the roofs. Apart from learning to be wireless operators, we also had to learn to be sergeants so we took turns to march a platoon around the parade ground yelling orders. We learnt how to solder or 'sodder' as the Canadians said it and also the Q signals, which were short for things, like QDM ("Give me a course to steer with zero wind to reach you".) We also had to learn X signals which were very similar. The phonetic alphabets had two lists: one American and one English, eg. "D" for Dog and "D" for Delta, etc. We had to learn both. The course that I had done while I was waiting to be called up stood me in good stead as I was top of the course in radio theory.

No. 2 Wireless School, Calgary

I thought that the hardest part of the course was the Morse code practice. They would send messages in cipher, in five letter groups so that you would not be able to guess a letter. Once you missed a letter it was hard to regain your concentration. But constant practice was the only way to cope. We would translate everything we saw into Morse, even advertisements we saw on the side of the road.

I entered in a one-mile race during an athletic carnival and came second. I also ran in the Calgary Road Race and came 22nd out of 82. It was over five and three quarter miles. Four of us from No.2 Wireless School were elected to compete: two Canadians, one New Zealander and me. We started in the main street and there was a fair amount of pushing and shoving because it was so crowded. The leaders, including a full-blooded Indian, were well ahead after the first four hundred yards. I tried to tag along but dropped further and further back. Nearly exhausted, I reached the last stretch - five blocks lined with cheering crowds. I put in a final spurt and sprinted those five blocks in fine style. I wonder what would have happened if there were cheering crowds all of the way. The C.O. of the College was at the finish line and he asked me if I had run like that all the way. I had to admit that I hadn't.

The physical education officer asked for volunteers from Australia and New Zealand to play ice hockey in a "curtain raiser" prior to a big game played by the Calgary Redsocks. The puck lay neglected in one corner of the rink while both teams lay on their backs all over the rink, but at least I could say I had represented Australia in an International ice hockey competition.

Often I went to the Y.M.C.A. downtown on Friday nights to learn to dance. Ellen Houston was my young dancing teacher but after a while she gave up teaching and just flirted with me. She was of Scottish descent and was really nice. She worked at an insurance company in Calgary and had a wonderful sense of humour. I often went to her place for dinner. She had a married sister who had a little baby and we would take the baby out for walks. She said that I looked very paternal while she looked on like an innocent bystander. I went out with her a lot and we wrote to each other when I was in England until one day she wrote and told me she was engaged to a Canadian sailor.

I went with several other Australians to the United Church that was the union of three congregations: Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterians. They had a congregation of five thousand or so on Sunday mornings. They had a large young people's group headed by a girl named Clair Scott whose father was an Australian. They had a bowling team and played against other clubs so several of us joined their team. We also had religious discussion groups where ten or twelve young people would get together to discuss our views.

They had many clubs for young people, one was an indoor bowling club that I joined others were ice skating, ice hockey, softball, and basketball. We would play against other churches young peoples clubs every Friday night. I finished up quite an average player.

It was surprising to see how confident some of the girls were, especially Clare Scott. Having an Australian father was probably help. He had a large motor repair garage in Calgary. I often wondered how it was that he finished up there. I don't think any Australians trained in Canada during the First World War.

Quite a few Australians married Canadian girls after this war was over. Many would have liked to but were killed in England or time took its toll while they were on operations. The Canadian girls were a lot friendlier than we expected.

Harry Brabin & Ellen Houston with her sister's baby in Calgary.

Ellen sent this photo to me in England. She wrote "I look very paternal while she looked like an innocent bystander"

We were welcomed by the people of Calgary who invited us into their homes for meals and we got to know many of the young girls that lived there. The church that we attended was not the only place we met them, but we were invited to join bowling clubs and at the YMCA were able to take dancing lessons. I trained for the Calgary road race with several of the local people and we would go running along the intended route. There were many quite steep hills to contend with. I did not reach the standard of fitness that some of them reached but I enjoyed their companionship.

The restaurants had cubicles where six or seven people could sit. They had a machine where you could put twenty cents into a slot and choose a record. Bing Crosby was very popular at the time especially his hit tune "I'm Dreaming Of A White Christmas" There was a central place in town where they operated from and supplied many restaurants. We would sit there for a long time listening to the music and drinking innumerable cups of coffee.

I met a girl there called Yvonne Hedstrom who took me ice-skating down the Bow River. They used to pour hot water on the ice to make it smooth enough to skate on. She lent me her brother's skates, which were much better than the ones that you could hire. They were

not little ones like we learnt on at home but much longer and more suitable for skating quickly. Her father was in the Army so she and her mother and young brother lived alone, her mother worked and Yvonne was at university.

Yvonne Hedstrom

Some times we would get the street-car to Boness which was quite a way towards the Rocky Mountains and go horse riding out on the prairie. You had to be careful as there were gopher holes all over, and the horse could break a leg if it put its hoof in one. I rode the same Arabian horse," Babe" each time. He was huge and I would feed him carrots. He was so tall that I had to stand on a stump in order to mount him. He was beautifully behaved and quite fast but I felt very safe on him. Had I the misfortune to fall off, I would have a long walk to find a stump so that I could remount him. There was a special empathy between us that I had never experienced with another animal and I was sorry that I had to move on at the end of my course. It was almost a tearful farewell.

There was a Y.M.C.A. hut on the campus where we could buy Coke, cakes, coffee and chocolate. We played a lot of table tennis there. They also supplied us with writing paper so that we could write home. All of the huts were double glazed and heated by oil furnaces in the basement. They needed to be, as the temperature dropped to minus forty on several days I was there. Huge icicles would form down from the roof gutters like frozen spears. It would take a few minutes when you went out into the snow for the cold to hit but you had to be careful not to get your ears or nose frozen. Most of us wore earmuffs. We would see large men wearing huge fur coats that reached nearly to the ground. They looked like huge bears walking along the street.

Outside the gates of the school there was a slope of twenty meters down to the road. The snow on this slope was compacted into ice and was very slippery. The only safe way of reaching the road upright was to take a little run and slide down it. Even the C.O. performed this action very gracefully. Being a Canadian he was used to skating.

The Calgary Version of The Dog Sat On The Tucker Box

At Christmas time we were given a weeks leave so three of us decided to hitchhike up to Edmonton. We went to the road that led north out of town and waited an hour before a car pulled up and offered us a lift to Red Deer. We had an early lunch at a diner. We ordered a mixed grill with chops and sausage and chips. We went to the service station and waited for a car to take us the rest of the way when a truck pulled up and offered us a lift if we sat in the back. We piled in with our kitbags containing our shaving gear pyjamas and clean shirts and enjoyed the fresh air. It was pretty fresh as there was snow everywhere.

When we arrived at Edmonton we walked along the streets on Christmas day and people invited us into their houses to have a piece of cake and a beer. As we progressed we eventually arrived at a house at teatime and were invited in. This time there were five young girls who were university students that lived with one of their parents. The parents were away visiting their parents leaving the girl to fend for themselves. We had tea and started dancing until late and they suggested that we stay the night. We shared beds with them but nothing else except for a few kisses and cuddles. The next day we waited for a lift back to Calgary but after some time a bus came along so we decided to catch it. We were counting out our money when a lady in the front seat gave the driver a five-dollar note. Saying, “Will this help”. So we had a pretty cheap leave, which was just, as well as we were on Leading Aircraftsmen wages of five dollars a day.

The next time we had leave we went into town to a restaurant and ordered T-bone steaks. They were so large they would have been enough for our whole family of five back home. I only did this once. Other times I would have a hamburger or a mixed grill as, these were

not on the menu in Australia when we left. We were drinking a lot of Coca Cola, as this was a very popular drink in Calgary. This was very addictive, but once we left Canada the desire never returned and I have never had it again.

Walking along the boardwalks we had trouble as the snow would freeze and the footprints would be frozen too so that the edges were very sharp and would cause nasty cuts if you fell over. We had to wear overshoes to keep our shoes dry.

I was sorry that we missed the Calgary Stampede however we heard a lot about it. The chuck wagon race sounded quite exciting. They roped steers ready for branding, and performed rope tricks and showed off their cowboy skills.

At the end of the course we were taken to an airdrome out on the prairie far from civilisation and flew around the area practising our "air to ground" Morse code. There was not much else to do so we practiced a lot until I reached thirty-two words a minute, but we had finished our Morse exam weeks before. It was quite a pretty area with many little lakes in it however we were too intent on sending messages to really appreciate it.

On completion of our course we were sent to Mossbank, Saskatchewan, to do our Bombing and Gunnery Course. I had caught the flu and had a high temperature when I was posted but didn't want to be left behind. I nearly passed out when I arrived and was put into hospital where I developed an acute earache in both ears and was feeling pretty low for a few days. However the two nurses that looked after me helped me to take my mind off my predicament. Every time I pressed the call button next to my bed one ofthem would come running to comfort me and give me painkillers, even though they were not supposed to without the doctor's permission. They were always laughing and joking.

Ellen Houston at Vancouver

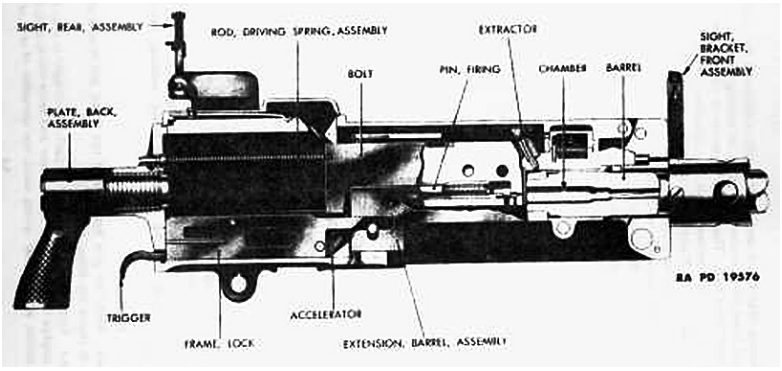
Harry Brabin in Calgary snow

Harry Brabin with Mossbank Nurses

Mossbank

The town of Mossbank was very small; a general store, a post office, a dance hall and five beauty salons. I never tried the beauty salons but I did go dancing practicing my new skills. The dance hall was very old with an uneven wooden floor and posts holding the roof up that had to be negotiated when you were dancing. A friend and I were invited to have lunch with a local family.

The local area was vast and flat; an ideal place for a Bombing and Gunnery school. We could fire away with our Browning machine guns without hurting anyone. At the school we learnt about all the parts of a Browning machine gun including the "rear sear cocking spring".



The Browning Machine Gun

We had to pull the Browning to pieces and put it back together in twenty seconds. We went up in a plane so we could shoot at a drogue (a canvas target) towed by a Norseman aeroplane. The trick was to wait until the end of the run and then fire off as many bullets as we could while we were turning. The drogue was closer then and much easier to hit. I also did a lot of skeet shooting at clay pigeons from various angles. You had to allow for deflection and shoot where the pigeon would be by the time the shot reached it. I quick-

ly learned to do this. It was one of the few things that I had a natural aptitude for. However this training was never put to use as the wireless operating and the gunnery positions were separated. This happened with the observers too, so that they were divided into navigator and bomb aimer positions.

Training in Canada was not without its risks. Over a hundred Australians were killed there.

Australians in Mossbank got into trouble for replacing the flag with some underwear. This was not in my time, I just heard about it. I do not know how they managed to get them or be able to climb up the pole.

After six weeks training the Attorney General of Saskatchewan awarded us our sergeants stripes and single wings. We were then posted to Halifax, Nova Scotia. This was a four-day trip by rail, although we did have sleepers. We passed through huge wheat fields and saw the occasional wheat silo. There were no hills but we often passed beautiful lakes. When we did come to a small town we were allowed off to stretch our legs. To alight, the black porters placed boxes on the ground. There were no railway stations we just pulled up in the main street. The porters asked about the White Australian Policy and we had some trouble explaining it. I do not think we did a very good job.

I had been issued with one large kit bag and three smaller ones. I found it difficult to manage all of them when we were making a major move. I did not like the winter underwear that I was given, as it was too hot and made me itchy. So I packed up three sets and put them in a duffle bag, waited until we passed a group of fettlers working on the railway line in the snow, and dropped the bag close to them. I wonder what they made of that. It sure lightened my load. I then carried the bags by tying them together and placing the largest on my back and the other two in front.

Upon eventually arriving in Halifax we were given leave and I went looking for the town. It was so small that I walked right through it without realising. I went to a Chinese restaurant and had a meal and became very sick so I went to the Air Force Hospital where they found I had appendicitis. They operated on me straight away but would not let me see what they had removed. I was able to see them operating by looking in the reflector. To this day, I still think it was the Chinese meal that had made me sick. After three days I was helping the nurses collect the dishes and playing table tennis without moving my feet very much. Also a dentist removed several teeth that had fillings in them as he said I would have trouble with them when flying at high altitudes! I often wish that I had seen a dentist in Calgary so I did not have to lose them.

We were sent into a decompression chamber and the pressure was decreased. We were given tasks to do which required us to write down on a page the answers to some questions. As the oxygen decreased we thought that we were functioning normally but when we were given oxygen to breathe again we realised the writing was just scribble. Later I wondered what the effects of depriving us of oxygen had on our brains. However, we did not seem to suffer any permanent damage.

While I was in hospital the rest of the draft were sent to the Bahamas for further training and finished up in Coastal Command. They spent the war flying over the sea for eighteen-hour periods searching for submarines; a much safer occupation than bombing the Germans.

I was given twenty-one days sick leave, so I went down to New York by an overnight ferry and train. I met a Jewish girl on the ferry and went down to New York with her. She took me to meet her parents who asked me if I was Jewish. The only time we got off the train was at Boston as a different company ran the train to New York. We had to walk five blocks to the other station. There were so many shoeshine boys who wanted to shine my shoes on this walk. I got a shine but this did not have the desired effect of stopping the others from pestering me.

In New York I visited the Canadian Club, which occupied a whole floor of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. A hostess asked me if I would like to stay with a family on Long Island for a few days. I accepted and arrangements were made for a visit for the weekend.

I met some other Australians and we went to the 'Rivers Club', 'The 21st Club' and 'Jack Dempsey's Bar'. We met some models from one of the top agencies there but they were a bit too sophisticated for us. The one that I was talking to was called Candy, she sure was sweet. Jack Dempsey visited our cubicle and chatted for a while and said "The drinks are on the house for you and the girls". We all found the generosity of some Americans was amazing. This was the first time I had drunk Bourbon on the rocks and probably the last.

I got into a conversation with a policeman standing on Fifth Avenue (with a great gun in his holster) and he invited several of us to see the police station. We saw line-ups where prisoners stood against the wall while detectives sat in the dark and listened while their records were read out. We were also taken down to the basement to the shooting range where they showed us how to draw from the hip and we fired a few shots at moving targets. One of the Australians I was with was invited to the home of the Rockefeller family and when he was leaving at the end of his stay they gave him a hundred dollars. One of the ladies at the Canadian Club asked if I would take her daughter Poppy, out to dinner and a show. We went to Radio City and saw the Rockets. They were great dancers and very scantily clad. The way they could high kick in unison was amazing. There were a number of other acts including some that were rather risqué. The foyer was walled with dark glass and was most spectacular. They used to ice skate in the area around Radio city in the winter. I am afraid that Poppy and I were rather late getting back to where she lived.

As I was walking along a street in New York a young boy called out to me "Why don't you join up mister?" There I was in my Australian uniform with my new sergeants stripes on my arm feeling quite proud of the Australian name flashes on my shoulders and my new wing showing that I was a W.A.G. to be ridiculed by a young boy. It took some time to get over it .He passed me too quickly to answer him and tell him I was an Australian serviceman. Most Americans we met did not know where Australia was. One of the lads went to a post office to send some stockings to his girlfriend and was told that they did not send parcels to neutral countries. Others were surprised that I could speak English so well. The hostess at the Canadian Club arranged that I would be able to stay for the weekend with a family on Long Island. My host's name was Dr.Jessup and had three teenagers.

They were members of an exclusive beach club, which had tennis courts, golf courses, indoor swimming pool gymnasium and a fine clubhouse. I was amazed that clubs privately owned nearly all of the beaches. No blacks allowed. The eldest daughter worked at an aircraft factory and invited me to visit and I was shown around and watched them make laminated wooden propellers. They used the same system that key cutters use, placing a

model above the blank and having a wheel follow the outline while it revolved and cut the propeller to exactly the same dimensions. I never saw wooden propellers used on any operational aircraft in Britain.

At the end of the week I was invited to stay at "Foxlands". A limousine driven by a chauffeur picked me up from the Jessup's and drove me to this magnificent mansion." The owners bred foxes so that they could put on their red coats and have the hounds run after the foxes. They would all call out "Tally Hoe" when the fox was sighted.

"Foxlands", Old Westbury, Long Island

The owners were Mr. and Mrs. Holloway. He had married the boss's daughter who was of the Grace family and was now managing director of the Grace Steamship Co. They had a fleet of ships that mainly went down to South America. They also owned a large building in New York, which had a huge statue of Atlas holding the world up on his shoulders. We approached "Foxlands" along a very long driveway lined with trees. We were met at the door by a butler dressed in colourful livery and I was shown to a bedroom upstairs so I could freshen up. While I was in the huge bathroom, which had two-inch taps so that you could run a bath in seconds, a maid had unpacked my kitbag and taken out my dirty clothes for the laundry. The towels were large and thick and I could only wrap them around me and pat myself dry.

There was a tennis court with a selection of racquets of different weights and racks of tennis shoes tennis shoes of all sizes but I was not able to play so soon after my operation. I was quite pleased to leave the city, as the hectic pace was a bit too much for me after just coming out of hospital

There was a twenty-five meter swimming pool and a garage with about twenty-five cars in it (although I was told that some belonged to the staff). They also had a kennel man who looked after twenty-five Skye Terriers; the trophy room had shelves full of trophies. The kennels were in a separate building on the estate.

There was a polo field and polo ponies as well. Some of the estate was used to grow vegetables as part of their war effort, but there were still some lovely gardens and walks through the property across rustic bridges and along fern-lined paths.

We dined at a long table with our host at one end and his wife at the other. We had footmen standing behind us and a butler hovering around to satisfy our every desire. One meal we had was of quails, several on each plate. There was not much flesh on them. The cutlery was made of hand beaten Peruvian silver, which they had collected when Mr. Holloway was manager of the Peruvian branch of the company many years before. The chandelier was made of smoked glass, a copy of the original they had seen in Ireland. In the hallway there were some wooden pews that had been in a Peruvian church and were very old.

They had a television set that was not working and wanted to know if I could fix it. As it was the first I had ever seen I was not able to be of much help. They had a huge billiard room with a full sized table. They also owned a flat in Park Lane maintained by a full time maid.

One afternoon we visited their friends, Ed Hutton and family. Ed, a stockbroker was Barbara's uncle. A liveried footman showed us into the gunroom to wait for the wife and daughter to appear. The guns were all antiques and included blunderbusses and cross bows and all sorts of duelling pistols. They hung from the walls with no space left to add to the collection.

The daughter of the house was about sixteen and her name was Diney. She became a film star and was in Australia years later to star in a film. I was offered a car to take her for a drive around the estate, but I had to admit that I had never driven a car so they had a sulky harnessed up to a beautiful pony and off we went. She sat rather close to me but I decided not to take advantage of one so young. Besides there were gardeners working about the place. She was the first girl I had met that had blonde hair and brown eyes. I am not surprised that she became a film star. She had all of the prerequisites.

After twenty-one days of luxurious living it was back to Halifax. There I found myself in a hut full of French speaking Canadians.

I was told that my air force records had been mislaid including my medical records. I could have wandered off and no one would have been any the wiser. To add insult to injury they insisted on giving me all of the injections again! I was not impressed with Halifax.

We heard about Wing Commander Guy Gibson bombing the Mohne and Elder Dams with skip bombs. He was awarded the Victoria Cross. There was a lot in the papers about it.

I was then sent back to New York for embarkation to England. The ship was the "Queen Elizabeth" capable of sailing to England in three days. It was jam packed with troops lying on the decks covering every square foot, so that we could not walk without stepping over someone. Crap, crown and anchor, poker and other gambling games were being played everywhere on the decks. I lost five dollars at a Crown and Anchor game and resolved never to gamble again.

We only had two meals a day. The mess deck had rows of tables from the central passage to the bulkheads. The food was placed at the head of the tables and those closest

helped themselves and passed the dishes on. Consequently those sitting near the bulkheads were sometimes left hungry. “Chowhounds” was the names given to the soldiers who had extra plates and pannikins.

We slept in four decked bunks in a storeroom well below the waterline. There was nowhere to place kitbags except at the foot of each bunk. The taller of us had trouble getting comfortable. The only showers were salt water and the soap, even though it was “special issue”, simply would not lather. All of the other Australians on board had trained together so I felt rather lonely.

On arrival at Liverpool we were put on a train for Brighton. It was a very long journey. Looking out of the window of the train I saw tiny cottages and little fields with the different crops coloured in variety of greens. We passed small villages, which were rather picturesque, and larger towns with row after row of old terraced houses, all looking the rather worse for wear. Even the people were poorly dressed, showing the effects of years of war. The weather was dull and it often rained. What a difference from sunny Australia yet it had a beauty that was softer and prettier than the countryside back home.

We eventually arrived at Brighton on the south coast and were billeted in the Grand Palace Hotel on the waterfront. The whole beach was mined and there was barbed wire everywhere. The hotel, now stripped to the bare essentials, had been magnificent in its day. It was eventually restored to its former splendour. (Val, my wife, and I stayed there on our first trip back in 1977). While I was there we were lined up in a narrow street so I thought I would reduce the congestion and got into a Jeep driven by the RAF driver. I was taken to an Air Sea Rescue Station further east of Brighton and from there, went out in a rescue boat. They were taking some movie photos of a fake rescue operation. I sure hoped that I never needed their help as I had heard stories about airmen who had finished up in the sea and that was something I did not want to experience. The WAF girl took me home and introduced me to her parents who provided me with dinner and a bed for the night. I got into hot water next day.

I spent quite a lot of time with a girl who was teaching me to become more proficient on ice skates. Her name was Dawn and she was a silver-medallist. Her sister was also very good and was teaching another Australian. They lived near Brighton cemetery. We teamed up and the four of us would go to restaurants and to the pictures together.

I wanted to buy a gift for my mother so we went shopping in an area that was full of quaint old antique shops. The streets were very narrow and it was a place in which Charles Dickens would feel quite at home. I bought a hand painted plate and carried it around carefully for the rest of the war . I presented it to my mother on my return, only to have my young sister break it a few months later.

One day we saw a German plane and a Spitfire trying to shoot one another down however neither was able to, and the German raced off back to France. It was quite exciting for a while with many of us cheering the Spitfire pilot on.

17.8.43

I was posted to West Freugh in Wigtownshire, South-west Scotland, near Stranraer. This was an advanced flying unit for wireless operators and navigators. We studied astral navigation (steering by the stars) using bubble sextants. We had to learn the major constellations and the stars within them, and the tables used to fix our position. We flew all around the north of England and the south of Scotland. We had a pleasant view of the countryside when it was not overcast. We had some navigating problems from time to time but managed to find holes in the clouds just in time to fix our positions. It was pretty scary as the navigators were all students putting the theory into practice.

I also tried learning to speak with a Scottish accent from a girl in the small village but without much success. Another girl in the village threatened her saying, "I'll tell your husband on you Aggie." All she was doing was trying to teach me to speak with a Scottish accent.

It was here that I met Bas Spiller, a navigator, because the W.A.F.s we were dating were friends. Bas and I decided that we would try to join the same crew. The girl I was dating was Vera Annette and she came from Northern Ireland. She was short, had very fair hair, and had a cute accent. There were not many places to go except for the shooting range. One day as we were sitting in the NAFFI hut drinking tea, Vera asked me if she should call the padre over to discuss our marriage. I realised it was time to move on.

Advanced Flying Unit (West Freugh, Wigtownshire)

13.9.43

I had been given leave but had postponed taking it until this happened so I went to the paymaster and asked for my leave pay. He said, "Tough. You should have taken it when all of the others did". I felt trapped until I saw the C.O. walking across the road. I explained to him that the paymaster would not let me go on leave. He was a very paternal old fellow and he kindly asked the paymaster to pay me, which he did very graciously. I just had time to say goodbye to Vera and catch the next train to London to visit Phyl Vaux, my mother's cousin. I stayed at the Grand Palace Hotel in the Strand, which was not very grand. I had my hair cut at a barbers shop and was charged ten shillings, I was amazed as I could have it done back home for two and six.

20.10.43

On returning from leave Bas and I had to report to Number 27 Operational Training Unit, Litchfield, Staffordshire. On arrival we were herded together on a parade ground and told to crew up. There were pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and air gunners. We did not know anyone who was in the other musterings. Mostly the pilots just went around and asked airmen if they would like to be in his crew just by looking at them. He did not get a chance at looking at their logbooks to see what their assessments were. Bas and I first looked around for a pilot, and seeing Bill Rabbit who was rather short and more our size, we asked him if he wanted a navigator and a wireless operator. Bill said, "I do", and we introduced ourselves. Bill had already chosen Don McLean as bomb aimer. Later Bill's friend, Jerry McSweeney, also a pilot, told Bill that he had been scrubbed because he had developed a rash on his face from wearing the rubber oxygen mask, and recommended his own bomb aimer. Bill replied, "I've already decided on my bomb aimer". Gerry said, "Pity, Don McLean is a terrific bloke as he has done some piloting, navigating and gunnery". Bill replied, "He's the one I have chosen". So everyone was pleased. A week later Sandy Concannon, who was from the same town as Bill in South Australia arrived at the camp. Bill was delighted to have him join up as a rear gunner. Sandy had spent a lot of time shooting kangaroos from the back of a truck .

We embarked on our operational training at Litchfield doing cross-country flights in Wellington twin-engine bombers. We practiced circuits, bumps, practice landings and of course, bombing. Bill used a cushion because he was so short and his landings were pretty bad. At last after the practice they were not as bumpy. The flying instructors had some doubts about letting him stay on heavy bombers but gave him time to prove that he could cope. He very seldom made smooth landings but we got used to the odd kangaroo hop that was his speciality.

There was an all officer crew on the course except for the rear gunner, and when an officer rear gunner turned up the pilot asked the sergeant to step down so the could all be officers. The sergeant was a bit resentful about this, but fortunately for the sergeant he was not in that crew when they were all killed on their first trip.

It must have been a big challenge for Bill to make the step up from the much smaller planes Bill had trained on. The Wellingtons were very well constructed with a geodetic framework, which meant they could take a lot of punishment. They were pretty old and needed a lot of maintenance . They were sent from squadrons that had replaced them with Lancasters and Halifaxes.

We had many hair-raising training flights and sometimes we became lost. Once we were caught in a balloon barrage over Birmingham. On that occasion Bill called out, "Like P/O Prune, the faster you go the faster you get out of trouble". P/O Prune was the hero in a comic mission in the R.A.F. magazine supplied to us. Its aim was to alert us to some of the pitfalls, including running off the runway onto the soft grass and getting bogged so that a tractor had to be sent out to pull the plane out. Fortunately we were never in that situation. If that happened we were warned that we would have to try and catch up with the stream after we had been rescued. This was a very dangerous position to be in.

On another cross-country flight Bill called out to Bas, "Do you know where we are?" Bas answered, "How could I when we have been over cloud for four hours!" Bill suggested that we get a radio fix, so Bas tapped me on the shoulder and told me to get a radio fix and a course to steer back to base. I had trouble all night because of the static but at that moment it seemed to clear and I was able to comply. We were only about five miles from Litchfield and Bas had not been far out. We made a slight change of course and were soon on the ground with a bit of a bump. This experience taught us to have confidence in one another, and to remain calm in difficult situations and to work together as a team. On another training flight we ran into headwinds and stormy weather and became short of petrol so we landed at Rhyl in north Wales. The runway was covered in a thin layer of ice but it was the best landing that Bill had made so far, not a bump. I could not believe that we were down. We refuelled and flew back to Litchfield.

Not all of the crews adapted to flying as a crew and night flying as we did. We were all marked as above average.

20.12/43

Our first flight out of Britain was a "Nickel". A "Nickel" was a RAF code name for the aerial delivery of propaganda leaflets. Our "target" was Paris. This was not considered an operational trip but it was as close to the real thing as you would want. We were to go to Paris and the Germans would shoot real anti aircraft guns at us with real live ammunition! This was to break us in gently as it was such a short trip and after all we were not carrying bombs but leaflets. The leaflets contained a letter from General De Gaulle and encouraging the French to help us win the war any way they could. Half the French were quite happy to have the Germans in control, as their previous government was not very popular. In fact they were just as bad as the Germans sending Jews to labour camps and rounding up Gypsies and other minority groups to work in the German factories.

Our briefing was as though we were to bomb Essen or some factory area in the Ruhr. All the specialist officers were there to brief us and it was though it was the real thing instead of just a training exercise.

A few new items had been added to help with navigation. One was called an 'Air Position Indicator', which gave latitude and longitude position with zero wind so when Bas found our real position, he could measure the strength of the wind. This, together with the 'Gee box', made the navigator's job a lot easier. Now we were to learn what ops were really about. The briefing was to be held at dusk and we donned our flying suits and fleecy lined boots, and were driven to the northern end of the aerodrome where the Wellingtons were lined up. Soon we were revving up for take off and then lifting heavily off the ground,

one plane following another. It was dark and the stars were very bright.

We had been training for two years for this moment. My feelings were mixed. At last we were to go over the Channel and be subject to the possibility of being shot down by either fighters or by flak. There was an amazing combination of fear and excitement. We had been warned many times not to think of anything else but the job in hand. I had trouble doing this, but was more afraid of showing my fear than I was of being killed.

We were greeted with a huge wall of flak when we reached the French coast. This was the first time we had experienced flak and the feeling of it hitting the aircraft was like gravel hitting the underside of a car. We copped it again when we reached Paris with occasional bursts on the way. Many searchlights lit the sky waving their fingers of light. It was quite a spectacular display much more colourful than fireworks night at home.

We dropped the leaflets and headed back to the coast. Poor Sandy was in the rear turret without an electrically heated suit. It was near freezing, so he was half frozen when we arrived back and had to be helped out of the turret. I expect he was more worried about being cold and freezing to death than he was of being shot down. This trip was not counted as an operation. If it had we would have been eligible for the "Air Crew Europe Star" awarded only to airmen who operated a month before "D' Day. The feeling of relief when we returned to Litchfield was something I had never before experienced. I felt a warm glow over my whole body when I realised that I was safe again.

We were told that previously crews that had only been together a few weeks had been sent on operations when nearly a thousand bombers were sent. They were ordered to go as well. These trips were credited on their logs so that they did not have to do so many when they were posted to a squadron. I am happy that we were not required to do this as so many crews were killed on their first trip.

There were many Australians among the instructors. These men with their ribbons, moustaches and slang became our heroes. They had completed a tour of thirty bombing raids and that made them a superior race in our eyes. They all wanted to do a second tour as they missed the excitement of being on an operational squadron. We were confident that we would each do our best to uphold their standards.

Five aircraft had been lost on night cross-country flights in a week, some vanishing into the sea. One landed unexpectedly on top of a hill, bounced off, slid down the other side without anyone being hurt. Bas remarked, "I wonder how many of this lot will see next year out". It was nearly as dangerous flying with twenty year old pilots who loved to fly at low levels at over two hundred miles an hour just for the hell of it, as it was to go on operations.

I could only reply, "It's hard to guess, but they say there are 5% losses on each raid on average and we are expected to do 30". Bill said, "I was told that on some raids there were 20% losses. Bas considered this thoughtfully. "We will have to be lucky but if we stay in the centre of the stream and don't lag behind and stay above most of others when we bomb, I am told we stand a good chance". Bill remarked, " There are a number of things we can do as a crew to minimise our chances of being killed. The gunners must keep a sharp watch out even when we are back in England. Every member of the crew has to be extra careful. We must practice to work together so that we are ready for any emergency". The crews that are shot down mostly are the new chums. We worked out how many bullets could hit a plane without killing any of the crew or hit some vital part. We were quite heartened by the result.

We went to London on leave as a crew and got to know the centre of London and each other. We were surprised to see so many people lining the underground platforms in the evening getting ready to spend the night there. I wondered whether they had been bombed out or were afraid of being killed by the falling bombs. We were passing a photographic studio and Bill decided that we should have a studio photograph taken. We must have just had a few beers because the outcome was pathetic or else the photographer was not up to scratch. Planning our leave activities required a certain amount of discussion. Would it be the pictures, a live show, the pub and which one, or the Codgers Club, an art gallery or a tour of St. Pauls? Bill usually made the final decision and eventually we did all of those things plus dancing at the Palladium. Whenever we went dancing, Sandy would stand and watch the dancers, then, when a Tango was announced, he would approach the girl with the most expertise and ask her to dance. They would put on a magnificent exhibition of this dance, then he would escort her back to her seat, and that was it! He was only interested in the dance. We others would always ask a girl where she lived to see if she was geographically possible. This was because one night I took a girl home that lived at Harrow, and when I returned to the station the last train had gone. I discovered I still had her dancing shoes in my greatcoat pocket. I did not know where she lived as I had left her at the corner of her street. However, I knew that she was a bus conductress so I called in to the bus station and explained the position and left the shoes there to be returned to her. I bet she had a surprise when she went to work.

I then walked until 6.00 in the morning to another railway station and caught the first train back to the Strand. I went to bed and slept until lunchtime. I was never caught like that again.

The R.A.A.F. headquarters in London were at Kodak House in Kingsway near the theatre district. There was a small shop there where we bought kangaroo badges to wear on our lapels. We wore them right through the war. We saw many of the shows that were running and had supper afterwards at the theatre restaurants where we met many of the cast. Sandy was absolutely amazed at the way some of the male actors behaved and dressed. He had never before seen effeminate men. It took him some days to come to grips with the fact that some men could act like girls.

One day when it was very hot we went swimming at a large pool complex. We met some Wrens who seemed impressed by our swimming ability. One was Hilary Pittendrick whose father was an admiral. She gave me her telephone number but I did not get in touch with her again.

We met a captain in the Buffs, which is one of the top regiments, and Bill was asking questions about class distinction in England. The captain defended himself saying, “It’s not us; the common folk are always doffing their caps, bowing and showing us deference. It’s not our fault”. Bill was good at giving lectures. Once he lectured a prostitute who approached him, suggesting that she should turn over a new leaf and be a good girl. He talked with her quite a while. I wonder if she took his advice.

The crew decided to play golf so we rang The Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club at Richmond, south of London and asked if we could have a game. It was quite an exclusive club but we did not know that. The club secretary said, “yes” so we turned up and he loaned us all the clubs and declined our offer to pay. He then invited us to stay for lunch after the

game. We had 'jugged hare' for lunch. We were assured that it was a rare treat. It was indeed very gamey.

We went to see a variety show called "Strike A New Note". It was there we learnt that English humour is quite different to Australian humour and I thought it quite different to American humour and rather odd. We also became honorary members of the Queens Club where we skated on their pristine rink. It was like skating on marble and the skates they lent us were top quality. I had plenty of practice ice-skating in Australia and Canada but I was never able to do anything fancy. I just managed to keep my pants dry.

One night the crew had its first experience with a London fog when visibility was down to one metre. We were all slightly inebriated and were climbing one another's shoulders so we could read the street signs. We tried shouting for an invisible taxi but to no avail. Eventually we found our way back to our hotel. All through the night we could hear soldiers calling out for taxis.

John Allen who was our engineer had been working as a fitter on aircraft engines before he remustered to air-crew, was telling us about burn victims who were mostly fighter pilots that had their faces burnt beyond recognition. They were sent to Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grimstead where Dr. Archibald McIndoe was the plastic surgeon. This was after we had seen three of the burnt airmen at a show in London, accompanied by three pretty young girls. They were laughing and joking when all around people were staring at their horrible disfiguration. He told us that some of the nurses married the airmen when they had recovered. Even though their faces were still a mass of scar tissue. Some of the wives who saw them divorced them. I was upset by the way some girls reacted, however delighted that some of the nurses were ready to marry them.

Back in Litchfield we soon found the local pub called "The White Swan" but nicknamed "The Mucky Duck". It was miles from anywhere but always well patronised because busloads of soldiers, airmen, W.A.F., farm girls, Army girls, and the locals gathered there every night. We met fellow Australians from other training camps and operational squadrons in the area. We were most intrigued to find that fighter pilots distinguished themselves by leaving the top button of their tunics undone.

Bas was brought up in New Guinea at a place called Samaria, down on the south east corner. His father was from New Zealand and had been a ship's purser. He now recruited labour for the plantations. Bas's mother had died when he was young so he was sent to a boarding school in Queensland. He had very fair hair and a golden tan and was very popular with the girls, but never became seriously involved with any of them because his darling Betty was waiting for him at home.

Bill was from Crystal Brook in South Australia where his mother was postmistress. His father had died when he was young. Sandy was also from there. His father was the local publican. Don was from Bowen in far north Queensland where his father had a general store and liquor licence. Don spent a great deal of time sailing around the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Bowen. John Allen, who was our engineer, was from Plymouth and joined the R.A.F. as an apprentice and remustered (changed from Ground staff) to Aircrew. But he did not join us until we were at a Conversion Unit and flying Halifaxes. 31st October 1943 was my 21st Birthday, and to celebrate we decided to cycle into Litchfield and have a few beers at the local pub. There was a huge man sitting in the pub all alone. He ordered a pint of beer and pulled out a bottle of whisky, drank some of the beer and filled the glass with whisky.

He continued doing this until at 10 o'clock when he passed out. We had about four beers each and were pretty well away, so when the publican asked us to take this big man out, we agreed. He was a dead weight and as we did not know where he lived we took him around to the local police station and left him there. We had difficulty mounting our bikes for the ride back to camp but with a little help from the policeman we coped. The policeman put Bas on one side of the bike and Bas fell off the other side. The rest of us were not much better. I thought what a different party I would have had if I were back at home.

Learning to ditch in case we landed in the sea was a manoeuvre our new crew excelled at. We practiced in a dummy aircraft by sitting on the floor and bracing our feet on a strut and our backs against another strut, with our hands at the back of our heads and our knees bent so that we would not be tossed around on impact. It was also a position for praying. Not that we did not trust Bill but it was just a precautionary measure.

To leave the plane quickly we would get out of the mid-upper escape hatch, carrying the dingy, radio-transmitter, rations, etc. and slide onto the wing and inflate the dingy. All in 11 seconds. We seemed to move as one man as we ran down the fuselage, grabbed a strut, swung our legs out of the hatch and slid down the outside of the aircraft, with only inches separating us. We also went to the local pool and practiced getting in and out of a rubber dingy. From what I have heard I am jolly glad that we never had to put this practice into action. The waves in the English Channel are really big sometimes and very cold indeed. Sometimes crews spent several days waiting to be picked up, and those are the ones who lived to tell the tale.

In Fradley, the village close to Litchfield, there are 23 Australian graves in St.Stephen's churchyard, close to the towpaths of the canal where we were to just miss a few weeks later.

Fortunately we missed out on going on any 1000-bomber raids while we were in Litchfield. Several Australians did on previous courses. Two crews were lost on a raid to Dusseldorf while they were still training. One navigator flew to Essen and had to bail out when they arrived back in England, and was able to wear a caterpillar badge when he went to a squadron.

On the 30th of May 1942 Bomber Harris organised a 1000 bomber raid on Cologne sending crews that were at Litchfield and had only been flying together for a few weeks with them. The city of 800.000 people was badly damaged with over a 1000 factories and commercial premises destroyed including the railway workshops. Many homes were destroyed and 500 were killed. We lost 40 aircraft and another 116 were damaged.

Our Operational Training finished on the 17th January 1944 and we were posted to a Conversion Unit at Harston Moor. Our C.O. was Wing Commander Cheshire, who was almost a legend even then. He was awarded the Victoria Cross, Distinguished Service Order and Distinguished Flying Cross when he was C.O. of 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Pocklington. The only other airman to be awarded the three medals was Australian Wing Commander Hughie Edwards .

It was here that we were given an engineer and a mid upper gunner. We did not have a chance to select anyone as they were simply allocated to us. We were happy with the engineer but the mid-upper gunner was very young indeed and was eventually to go L.M.F. (Lack of Moral Fibre) after a small incendiary bomb landed next to him inside the aircraft without detonating.

. There was a high crash rate for the novice crews because of this. We finished there on

the 30th April 1944 having completed twenty-one lessons in all. These included cross-country Missions using "G" for navigation and every other possible and impossible situation we might experience on bombing operations. On our second exercise We had to fly to London and back using H2S, we really did have two engines stop, one on each side and we had to crash land at Lichfield where we had crewed up and done our initial training. One engine was shuddering and there was a screaming sound coming from it. Bill could not feather the engine. No sooner that Bill had us flying straight and level again than another engine on the other side did the same thing. Bill called for us to bail out, but the intercom was not working so we did not hear him.

19.03.44

Marston Moor 52 Conversion Unit was the site of a famous English battle during the War Of The Roses. It was very flat country and an ideal place for the purpose. We converted from two engine Wellingtons to a four engine Halifax Mark 111. It was a much safer aircraft than the Wellington. If one engine failed it was still flyable. We were able to fly on two engines. On our first tour, two engines on one side were damaged but we still managed to land. Because all of the planes here were from operational squadrons and were past their prime the maintenance was not very good. Often when asked to do a cross-country exercise we would have to examine a number of aircraft to find one that was safe to fly

1st tour crew(102 Squadron)With ground staff.
On Turret: Alexander Conncannon, Rear Gunner
GS, John Allen, Eng.; Don McLean, B.A.; Bas Spiller, Nav.
GS,GS,Bill Rabbit Pilot, GS, Harry Brabin WAG
(GS = ground staff)

We began to slip sideways. Bill said, “This will do me, but we had better face the way we are going”. We turned and landed on a cabbage patch, then onto some grass and kept racing towards a huge cement canal. Bill retracted the undercarriage so that we slid along on the belly and stopped about five feet from it. A fire truck came screaming along by our side. By this time we had all climbed onto the top of the plane. Bas called out “Is there a dance on here tonight?” We all jumped to the ground and ran for a while as we thought the plane might explode then we stopped and looked back and were pleased to see Bill and John climbing out of the escape hatch. There was a trail of petrol along the skid marks we had left on the grass. We went to the sergeants mess for lunch and we were given soup to start, but we all had trouble holding our spoons steady as we were all suffering from delayed shock. We did not get to go to the dance, as we were instructed to catch several trains in order to return to Marston Moor. We had to carry our parachutes and we were wearing our flying boots and Bas had his navigation bag to carry. We received many funny looks from fellow passengers.

Two engineering officers went to Litchfield to examine the aircraft and found that some parts of both engines had not been replaced after a 500-hour inspection hence the engine failure. Bill was extremely coolheaded in the way he was able to belly-land the aircraft. He saved our lives that day.

We had hoped to be posted to an Australian squadron but were disappointed to find that our new squadron was very mixed, with Canadians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and one or two from British colonies from around the world. The British too were a mixed lot coming from all parts of England Scotland and Wales with a few Irish as well.

1.05.44

We were posted to 102(Ceylon) Squadron at Pocklington, which was situated on the Hull Road from York. This was an unusually large squadron in that it had three flights instead of the usual two. Instead of having twenty aircraft it had thirty.

The First Day On The Squadron

That’s your aircraft over there
Exclusively yours “N” for Nan
Get to know her best you can
You’ve got ten seconds if she ditches
Completely filled with dials and switches

And painted black inside and out.
The ground-staff lads are covered in grease
Full of respect and eager to please.
They adjust the controls and run up the engines,
Alter our seats and show us the heaters,

Which blow warm air over very small areas.
We make jokes to break the tension
We lose many crews on their first flight
So take it easy, don’t look for a fight.
We go off to briefing to get the gen.

The targets Orleans. We are about to begin.
The bombload is about eight thousand pounds
Five or six hours should see it through.
We run up the engines and race down the runway
The people below get smaller and smaller.

We land on the clouds and go right through
And soar above all the small cities
On course we make a minor correction
Over the Channel and into France
The flak rises thickly as we cross the coast

Puffs of black smoke appear around us
Small bits of shrapnel hit our aircraft
Our gunners are edgy eager to shoot
The navigators busy plotting our route
The engineer balances the fuel in our wings

At last we see the target come into our view
The bombsight is set for wind speed and height
Right, a bit to the left, hold it steady, steady
Bombs away, keep it straight for the photo
I have hit the gasometer, just look at the blast.

A great ball of fire can be seen far below
We dive to the port "Lets get out of this"
Fires and searchlights make night look like day
We head for the coast as fast as we can
The engines are throbbing and everything is steady.

Now over the Channel we relax once more
A comforting warmness comforts us all
"Keep watch for fighters we are not home yet"
We pick up our lights of the outer circle
We are taking our turn to spiral down.

Down we glide until it's our turn to land
Bump go the wheels as we touch down at last
Back to or dispersal we taxi along
At last we arrive at our special bay
We unload our parachutes and our Mae Wests.

Into a truck to take us to debriefing.
The intelligence officer takes down our story.
Drink a cup of coffee with rum from the padre,
Then quickly look around to see who is missing
Then it's off to the mess for sausages and eggs.
A special treat at the end of each Mission
We then go to bed and try to relax.
Stoke up the fire to help keep us warm
Try not to think about those who aren't back
It seems so unreal just like a bad dream.

Pocklington has a very old church, a grammar school, a pub, a high street full of small shops, village green where they play cricket, and best of all for us, a dance hall.

We are allocated to a hut full of iron beds and given a list of the things we would need to collect from various stores-sheets, mattresses, coal, etc. We chattered to the old hands sitting in the next hut who tried to frighten us with stories about the raids they had been on. They told us about the month when Flight Sergeant Dai Pugh and his crew had ditched in the English Channel and were not rescued until three days later. Only he, the pilot and his wireless operator and rear gunner had survived. In four operations the squadron had lost 39 crew killed, 39 prisoners of war and five wounded. This amounted to 13 aircraft and equated to a 26% loss rate for the month. We learned that Flt.Lt.A.Silverman and all of his crew had crashed in 'N' for Nan on a trip to Aulnoye in April. All of them were killed

Pocklington Runways

One of the old hands told us that when the squadron had Whitley's they had two pilots two Wireless Operators and one Observer.

Our crew were all sergeants except Bill who slept in the officers' quarters, had a batman and ate in the officers' mess.

The ratio of ground staff to aircrew was six to one. We had thirty-four crews on the station, with seven in each crew. There were about one and a half thousand on the squadron. During our training there had always been fairly strict discipline but on the squadron the atmosphere was much more relaxed.

We were told of a "deceased effects" section where personal possessions not wanted by relatives were sold. We bought ourselves bicycles there. I became very attached to mine and had it until the end of my first tour when I took it on the train down to Somerset and it was missing by the time I reached Bristol. It had been taken from the guard van somewhere on the way.

The camp was well dispersed. The ablution block in our area was half a mile from the sergeant's mess. The sleeping huts were in clusters between fields of wheat or other crops. In time we discovered where all of the sections were: photographic, parachute, fuel etc. and become more familiar with the activities on the squadron. It was interesting to watch a W.A.F. folding a parachute so carefully or developing photographs of the various targets or sending messages by Morse code. I was given a set of some of the photographs of the crews on the squadron when the war finished and I sent them to the secretary of our squadron association.

We were all photographed in a borrowed sports jacket and given the photographs in case we were shot down and wanted to forge identification papers. We were issued with compasses that were in the form of two buttons that could be put together; in case you were escaping and wanted to find your direction.

The first plane to be lost over Germany on the 8th September 1939 was piloted by Squadron Leader C. Murray from 102 squadron. The plane was a Whitley and all of the crew were taken prisoners.

We heard that Walter Nowotney, the German fighter ace, had died in Osnabruck hospital. He had shot down about 150 of our aircraft and was only 22 years old. One of our pilots bagged him as he was landing and had dived through a lot of flack to get him. It was the Germans who started this caper so I was not too upset. The best of the German fighter pilots was Erich Hartmann with 352 killed.

While I was quite excited and frightened at the same time I pretended to be calm. After all the training that I had done before and after I had joined up, now, at last I was to be operational.

The Halifax squadrons with the heaviest losses in January 1944, the worst month, was 434 Squadron with 24% loss rate followed by 102 Squadron with 18.7% losses on each bombing raid. When the Halifax II's suffered more than 16% causalities, Sir Arthur Harris decided that the crews should not be asked to suffer such great odds. He ordered the replacement of Mark II's with Mark III's. Our aircraft, "N" for Nan, was one of the first of these. 102 suffered the third highest losses on Bomber Command and the highest percentage of losses in 4 Group. (This information obtained from The Bomber Command War Diaries, Penguin Books, page 737).

Training took its toll as 2,800 casualties including 834 Australians were killed in England while they were training, more than those in Fighter and Coastal Command combined.

When we arrived at the squadron, they had run out of planes to give us so the C.O. gave us ten days leave. The high aircraft loss was not encouraging. They were expecting a delivery of the new Halifax 111's with its new engine, and one of these would be ours.

Halifax Mark 111

Four Bristol Hercules 1675 horsepower. Radial Engines.
Max Speed: 277 mph.at 6000 ft.
Cruising speed: 225 mph at 20,000 ft.
Service ceiling 20,000 ft.
Range 1,770 miles.
Armament. Eight-303in. Browning machine guns in mid upper and tail turrets.
Bomb load 13,000 lb.
Weight empty: 38,332lb. Loaded 65,000 lb
Dimensions Span 104 ft.2in.
Length: 71 ft.7 in.
Height: 20 ft. 9 in.

The 3rd of May was Sandy's birthday, so we celebrated at a pub in Pocklington village. We had trouble finding our way back to the base in the darkness. I remember Bill stumbling into a ditch, however we all made it back in one piece eventually.

Near our dispersed sleeping huts was the W.A.F. Sergeants' mess, formerly a farm cottage converted for this purpose. It was the most comfortable and homelike place on the squadron, with soft lounges, a large kitchen, open fires and good company. I did not discover this haven until I was doing my second tour and became friendly with one of the sergeants. I soon made myself comfortable there and I did not tell a soul about it. Another Australian, Stan Walker, and several English sergeants had discovered it already, but Stan and I were the only aircrew men in the know. Pixie Pickering was one of the sergeants, and I could tell her hand when she was sending Morse code. This is a remarkable thing that everyone has an easily distinguishable fist when they are sending Morse.

Our Base Commander was Gus Walker, the youngest Air Commodore in the R.A.F. He was a Rugby blue from Oxford. One of his arms had been blown off while he was rescuing a crew before their aircraft blew up. The officers said that he was very popular and he was made a Member of Parliament after the war. I think he was knighted as well. He was married to a young ex WAF and drove around the station with his little spaniel.

Our brand new aircraft was 'N" for Nan, and we had Merle Oberon doing a Can-Can painted on the side. A picture of a bomb was painted each time we did a trip. At the end of the war there were 90 bombs. Other crews had also flown her when we were on leave. The aircraft were well dispersed; hundreds of yards apart around the perimeter of the drome as a safety precaution against enemy attack. We were going on our first operation and were driven by a W.A.F. in a wagon to our aircraft where we waited, clad in our sheepskin jackets and fur lined boots.

A N.A.F.F.I. van came around selling little cakes and tarts and tea or coffee. We pressed the cake and tart together. They tasted better that way as the cakes were a bit dry and we could wash them down with the coffee.

We crawled through the side door of the aircraft with all of our kit. Mae Wests and parachutes etc. The ground staff pushed the started trolleys into position, ready to start the engines. These were started one at a time. It was always a heart stopping moment as each caught and roared into life. We taxied out onto the runway like a line of cars going to a funeral.

We then did our pre-flight checks. We took off the Pitot head cover, which allows the airspeed indicator to work, then revved up the motors and read the pressure gauges. We checked that the ailerons and rudder were working properly. The engineer checked that the fuel was evenly distributed so that one wing did not drop down lower than the other. Some days we would swing the compass. A tractor would pull us around in a circle while we calibrated the magnetic deviation onto a card. We were each meticulous about our own checklist.

Sandy had aligned his guns so that the bullet pattern was concentrated at a thousand yards. The gun-sight was an illuminated graticule in the form of a circle. Sandy would wait until an attacking enemy until its wings would fit just inside the circle this would mean that the range that was OK. He would call out on the intercom "Corkscrew port" as a warning. The when the fighter was within range "Corkscrew port- GO!" Both gunners would open fire.

They each had some bullets that showed up as a tracer so that the gunners could tell where they were going. Then they could aim their guns as if they were hoses.

The enemy fighters were usually ME109E. FW 190. JU88 or ME 110.

We had models of these and many others hanging up so that we would easily recognise them. We also had models of our own aircraft displayed so that we did not shoot down our own. We were told that you should be very careful whom you shot at, as some gunners would fire at the source of any gunfire without ensuring that it was from the enemy. The training for gunners was only for several months but there was a lot that they had to learn.

We were dead keen at this stage to get as much experience as we could, as the time was quickly running out before the real thing happened.

I was very confident in Sandy's ability, as he had spent some time shooting at kangaroos. From experience I knew that they were harder to hit than I expected by far. Sandy proved his ability by shooting rabbits on the farm in Somerset.

Charley Hood on the other hand was an unknown quantity as he was very young. Fortunately the rear gunner had the greatest responsibility by far.

Sometimes we would have to wait until the weather cleared. Don would say, "What did you do in the war, daddy?" Then he would be able to reply, "I just waited. I just sat around and waited, son". He also brought us to earth if we talked excitedly about the dangers we had escaped from. He pretended to be a news cameraman filming us while he sang the signature tune of "Movietone News".

We were given the go-ahead by the control tower and then the next plane crawled into position. Soon it was our turn to take off. Slowly we picked up speed and held our collective breaths until we rose from the runway and climbed steeply heading for our assembly point. So far so good.

Wireless Operators Pocklington.

This was the real thing after all of the training we were on the way to our first target. The photos we took of the bombs landing on the target showed that Don had hit the bulls-eye.

The same thoughts that I had when we did the "Nickel" over Paris came to me again with renewed fears and excitement. There was so much to occupy my mind remembering all that I had been taught and concentrating on the job in hand that I became calmer as time went by.

Bas Spiller, Harry Brabin, Bill Rabbit, Sandy Concannon & Charley Hood

1st Mission 22.5.44 Orleans, South of Paris,
5hrs 30mins. Night

This was our first Mission. We did this Mission in "P" Peter.

We had 8,500 lbs. of bombs. The target was a railway bridge, railway station and repair workshops. This was part of a campaign to destroy rail traffic over the Seine and the six rail routes in the Paris gap. I was impressed by the nonchalance displayed by the other crews at the briefing. I tried to emulate them but had trouble keeping my heart rate down.

I do not know what the others in our crew were thinking but I was trying very hard to hide my fears. The reality of what we had volunteered for was sinking in. The old hands had tried to frighten us with tales of near misses and losses in the past. We did not let on that they were affecting us but it was affecting me.

The crew sat in their takeoff positions behind the engineer so that we could brace ourselves against a spar. Bill would race the engines before we started rolling then take off the brakes and we would roar down the runway. He would have synchronised the engines and then held the plane down until the last moment as we had so much load on board.

The amount of petrol that we carried depended on the length of the trip and the bombload would be worked out accordingly. It was a great relief when we were airborne as we thought of the number of bombs that we carried.

We crossed the French coast just after sunset and were met by a wall of flak. Puffs of grey smoke remained after each anti-aircraft shell exploded, building up so thickly that Sandy remarked that he was going to get out and walk home on it. Searchlights lit up the sky like daylight. Nearby, Sandy saw tracer bullets coming towards us. "Corkscrew, Corkscrew", he yelled. Bill put his foot down and moved the stick, diving to the left then up to the right again, changing direction in a corkscrewing way. I was amazed that such a large aircraft could be thrown around in such a manner. Sandy asked if any of the crew could see the fighter as he didn't want to shoot at the source of the tracer bullets in case it was one of ours returning fire after the fighter had vanished. Don called out, "Open the bomb-bay doors, Skipper". We were now on the run up to the target and Don gave the orders from the nose. "Left, left, steady, steady, steady, right, steady, bombs away!" We had to keep straight and level so that the bombing would be accurate, we would keep flying like that so we could take a photo of the target as our bombs exploded. Flying straight and level gave the enemy a chance to predict were we would be when the shell arrived so it was something that we had to learn to live with. Counting those seconds seemed like eternity. Bill called "Home we go. Lets get out of this". "Course to steer, please Bas?" Bill put the nose down to gain more speed, as returning to cross the coast was dangerous because Germans had many anti-aircraft placements there. Then it was across the Channel and back to Yorkshire to find our airdrome and endure Bill's bumpy landing. We were very glad to be back from our first trip in one piece. Everyone said the first trip was the worst. Maybe on the next trip I would not be so frightened. Some friends from 460 Squadron told us that nearly half of all deaths took place in the first six operations on their squadron. Only 2 percent occurred on the 21st operation.

We all had to attend a debriefing session upon our return. The first question we asked was, "Who is missing?" We discovered that 18 aircraft had been lost out of 400. That is

4½% -about average. Still it meant 126 airmen were either killed or made prisoners of war. They said that one in seven of those shot down survived and were imprisoned.

It was great to get out of our flying clothes and go to the mess for our "operational egg. We had one for each man after every trip. Mind you, I really appreciated the coffee that the padre handed out as we went in the door of the debriefing room. He also had a bottle of rum and asked if you wanted a tot in your coffee. Most of us said "no" so he tipped that tot into a bottle for later consumption. You can guess that he was an Australian. Bill sold him our car when the war ended but we never saw any money. We had a lot of fun with the car so we could not complain even though it cost each of us more than a weeks pay.

The Germans had developed a radar device called "Freya": an aerial that could pick up our planes as they left the British coast. A more accurate Wurzburg detector took over as the planes drew closer. They could plot their night fighters right up to visual or switch over to FUG 350, which homed in on our H2S radar device. A group was sent over to France to steal one of these detectors so that we could find out how it worked.

General Eisenhower decided that it would be easier to destroy the German fighters while they were on the ground rather than in the air, so we bombed and staffed their airdromes and workshops for months prior to the invasion.

An ingenious German invention was to install upward firing canons on their fighters - referred to by the Germans as "Schrage Musik". It might have been musical to them but to me it was quite discordant.

Previously the fighters attacked from the rear, which put themselves at some risk from our rear gunners. Now they could carefully fly just below and to the rear of us and take their time shooting us down. They also used the exhausts from our four engines to line up with so they could accurately pinpoint our distance. This made their attacks more deadly. Using these new devices the Luftwaffe night fighters shot down 78 of the 823 strong force that was sent to Leipzig on the 19th February 1944. On the 30th March 1943, 795 Lancasters and Halifaxes left to bomb Nuremberg in southern Germany. The German fighters caught up with the main stream at Charleroi and shot down two bombers immediately. The night was very clear so the fighters had a field day. By good luck or good planning they guessed our target. The stream flew past Aachen and the duck shoot began. Armed with their upward firing cannon they opened fire on the bomb-bay doors and the bombs exploded leaving only fragments of the plane and crew. Soon 24 were blown up and 12 more were shot down before they reached the target. After they had bombed, the stream swung southwest towards Stuttgart then to Dieppe. On that raid alone, 95 aircraft with their 665 crew were lost. Another 71 planes were badly damaged. There were more airmen lost on this raid than during the whole of the Battle of Britain.

The British and American Air Forces had to gain supremacy over Normandy before the invasion so a determined effort was made to destroy the German fighters on the ground. From March to May 1944, 2,442 Luftwaffe planes were destroyed in action and another 1,500 through accidents and other causes. Every railway line and bridge, except some we wanted to use after the invasion in the Normandy area, was blown up. Other areas were targeted as well, so that the Germans were kept guessing about the actual landing place. They thought that we would not land on the day we did, as the weather was so bad.

2nd Mission 24.5.44 Colline Beumont, South of Alencon SW of Paris.
3hrs 30mins. 11,000 lbs of bombs. Night.

The target was an ammunition dump. The crew were not so nervous on this our second trip. It was a comparatively uneventful trip and this helped to build our confidence in my swivel chair directly under Bill, I afforded him good protection. Fighter pilots had steel plates fitted to their seats. Bill had me! There was a small window next to me so I could look out. The Marconi transmitter and receiver were on top of one another in front of me, with a small table that folded down fitted with a Morse key. This table had to be lifted when I vacated my position. I also had "Fishpond", which was a cathode ray oscilloscope, which showed me all of the planes that were flying below us as green blips; if any of the blips moved in a suspicious way then I was to report this to Bill and the gunners. If all of the dots on the screen were the same size and did not move or suddenly appear I was able to assume that they were friendly.

I was kept busy dropping "window" (a metal strip that clogged up the enemy radar) and I had been given a number of frequencies to monitor and was instructed to listen for the German controllers and broadcast our engine noise on these frequencies when I heard them talking.

We also had Identification Friend Or Foe, which stopped us from shooting down or being shot down by own aircraft.

There was a direction finding loop that enabled us to obtain the direction of any transmitting station.

We were given a coding machine so that all of the messages that we sent or received were in code and changed every day

It was my job to help release the bombs if they were stuck and anything else that needed done, such as render first aid or provide Bill with cups of coffee from a thermos flask.

The first trips were the most dangerous, about five times more dangerous than those flown later in a tour. After these, our skills and confidence improved and the number of losses lessened. Some felt superstitious about their 13th trip, but losses eased after passing this hurdle and remained steady until the last trip of the tour. The "this is too good to be true" nerves took over again. It was amazing how many crews were shot down on this trip. The photographs that we took of the target after our bombing showed that Don had been very accurate.

When we were well away after take-off I would unwind the aerial, which was a long wire with lead weights on the end of it. Before we landed I had to rewind it by hand. This took several minutes. If it were not rewound it would catch on something as we landed and break off. The ground staffs were not very happy when this occurred.

3rd Mission 5.6.44 Maisy (Situated on the French coast),
4hrs 45mins. 10,700 lbs of bombs. Night.

The noise of so many aircraft starting up was quite something. We had been taken around to our dispersed aircraft in a van driven by a pretty young lass. Bill sat in the front seat. We gradually moved off. Bill was careful not to let the wheels run off the hard, as there is always a chance when he increases the throttles, that he will over do it, and hold up everyone while we get towed onto the tarmac again.

We gradually moved into position until we received the green light from caravan where the controller was positioned. It was quite exhausting for Bill to handle a fully laden aircraft. Finally we built up speed and we all held our breaths until we were airborne and could breath easily once more. Bill had set the course on the compass before we took off so Bas could go from his takeoff position back to the Nav table.

Sitting in the mid section of the aircraft on top of four tons of high explosive in the bomb-bay directly below I was really praying that we would make our take-off successfully.

When I had myself seated in my position under Bill in the nose I had to stow all of the stuff in place. We had a code machine which had a new card inserted into it each trip so that we could send and receive in code. I had to unwind the trailing aerial and turn on my radio and the Fishpond, which was an oscilloscope that showed little green blips that represented aircraft that were flying below.

Soon we were at 5,000 feet and levelled out. Bill was synchronising the four engines so that they made a nice coordinated note.

It was pitch black as I looked out of the small window next to my position. We were flying through layers of cloud so that we could not see the stars or of any other aircraft, but now and again we would feel the slipstream of a plane that was very close.

We flew on and on until Don said, “I can see the target straight ahead. There is a lot of flack. The target was on the coast so it was easily recognised without the markers. The flak was coming up all around it and searchlights lit up the place like daylight.

Bill switched the VHF onto intercom so we could all hear what the Master Bomber giving his instructions. He would have been orbiting the target and watching where the bombs were falling. Bill opened the bomb-bay doors and we started our run up to the target with Don giving instructions from the nose. It was pretty clear to him where he had to drop them, as the target was railway marshalling yards, and gun positions that would be firing on the troops on “D’ Day if we did not destroy them.

There were 26 aircraft from our squadron, the largest number we had ever sent on a mission.

1,012 aircraft bombed. Three were shot down. The target was fortifications on the coast. Twenty-six aircraft from our squadron were detailed to attack; this was the greatest number of planes we had ever sent.

We destroyed fortifications, railway marshalling yards and some tank concentrations, which threatened Utah beach, one of the landing beaches. To be sure of our accuracy we bombed at 2,000 feet. We had a near miss over the target as one of our own aircraft came closer to us than we would have liked. Charley our mid upper gunner let out a startled yell as it passed his turret. The gunners were doubly alert concerning our own aircraft after that happened.

We had a backstop, as Don our bomb aimer was also trained as a navigator and gunner, and had some training as a pilot, and was also trained as a bomb aimer. Bas had done the bomb-aiming and gunnery course. I was a wireless operator and had trained as a gunner and had done a sat nav course so that I could take star shots for the navigator. John the engineer had been remustered from ground engineer to aircrew and was a great help to Bill. He helped Bill to synchronise the four engines. Don, on more than one occasion helped Bill control the plane when we were in a steep dive and Bill was having trouble pulling out of it. He also navigated when Bas was wounded. So we cooperated with one another in every way.

Many of the ground troops who were to take part in the invasion had not had any previous experience however they had spent many years training for this day. The Americans had trained both in America and in England and were probably better fitted for the job. No expense had been spared in providing them with good equipment and food.

4th Mission 6.6.44 "D-Day" Operation "Overlord" St.Lo(near Caen), 5hrs 10mins. 6,500 lbs of bombs. Daylight

This was the first time that our squadron had operated in daylight. Being so early in our operations we were awed by the task ahead. Bas had been quite a time preparing his charts with the winds given to him by the Met Section.

An amazing barrage from 1,012 aircraft struck in various places along the French coast. At least 5,000 tons of bombs were dropped altogether. To distract the enemy, a number of "Dummy" parachutists were dropped in various places to simulate landings in areas where we did not intend to land.

If we were successful we would save many lives from being destroyed by German gunfire. We left England in the evening. This was the first time that we were told of the invasion. Don was really keyed up knowing that his expertise was vital to the success of the landing. We could see thousands of trucks bumper-to-bumper heading south. We could see thousands of troops being embarked from ports all over the coast. The sky was filled with aircraft towing gliders full of paratroopers. Thousands of landing craft, destroyers and hospital ships surged across the Channel. It was a moving and spectacular sight. It was hard to take it all in. Each ship was a community in itself, with a captain and a cook and all of the sailors with the mates that they crewed with. No one had a better view of it than those of us flying above it all. This was the greatest number of ships ever to be assembled. The wake from each ship joined with that of the ship next to it. There was broken water as far as I could see.

Leading the invasion were a dozen minesweepers, which did their job and returned to England. Then came hospital ships, destroyers, barges, landing craft, battleships and troop carriers. Line after line, ten lanes wide, and twenty miles across. About 5,000 ships of all shapes and sizes. Many had barrage balloons flying above. The larger ships were firing shells at a rapid rate towards the coastal defences. We saw a prefabricated harbour called "Mulberry" being pushed and pulled along by about ten tugs. It did not look anything like a mulberry to me. This was a huge undertaking and must have been made over quite some time to ensure that it could be put in place, and serve the purpose for which it was made. We saw some aircraft pass too closely to a cruiser and were fired upon for some time even though they were sending Aldis lamp signals in Morse Code to say they were British. Fortunately they were not hit. The sky was filled with American fighters flying in pairs. They were wandering about in an unorganised manner trying to do something useful without much success. The absence of German fighters was noticeable. I for one was amazed. I never imagined that I would have such a grandstand seat to such a spectacular show.

The Canadian convoys were heading for Sword, Gold and Juno beaches, and the Americans for Omaha Beach. In the air there seemed to be as many gliders carrying 30 paratroopers in each, as there were ships in the sea. Our target 40 miles inland was the headquarters of the German 84th Corps. A surprise birthday party for General Erich Marcks was

just getting underway, and what a surprise he must have had to see English paratroopers dropping into his garden! All sorts of equipment was being flown in as well, field guns and even small bulldozers.

Many of the pilots that were carrying the troopers were flying too low and were going too fast as they were afraid of the flak so that the troopers had to bail out too close to the ground. Some of them landed badly.

A huge glider train landed on fields where paratroopers had been working all night to prepare for them, dynamiting some obstacles that otherwise could not be removed. Many of the paratroopers were dropped miles away from their targets and could not find out where they were. Some landed in mud flats and had trouble getting out as they were carrying so much gear. They also had trouble finding their platoons as they were carried away by the wind. Because of the recent bad weather most of the German Commanders were on leave or away at conferences. They thought the weather too rough for an invasion to be mounted, and in fact Eisenhower had very nearly called it off. The fact that he hadn't, worked in his favour, as the Germans did not expect it to happen in such bad weather but fortunately the weather started to clear just in time. This was fortunate as the troops were overloaded with all of the gear they were given to take with them and had a great deal of trouble finding their units. Some of the junior officers just gathered up those they came across and formed new platoons and carried on with the job they had been given. (Nine thousand troops were killed or wounded.)

Firstly St. Lo was not only an important rail centre on the way to Caen and therefore the one on which the Germans could be able to bring up reinforcements.

There was some confusion on the part of the Navy on who was friend and who was foe. Bill did not take any chances and kept well away from all of the Naval vessels. Some aircraft didn't and so there were some hair-raising near misses to relate on their return.

Secondly, the photographs showed that our bombing had been successful in blocking the road and rail access. Much damage to the German 84th Corps was also accomplished. We had to complete our bombing by midnight, as the paratroopers were to land as we finished bombing. The flak was fairly accurate and there was a lot of it.

The Navy bombarded the beaches with tons of shells. Hundreds of planes loaded with a heavy weight of bombs dropped their loads on the German defences while fighters strafed the troop concentrations. Never had such firepower been concentrated upon such a small area. German causalities (killed and wounded) totalled 250,000 while we lost eleven aircraft. The organization behind the invasion was huge. The way we kept the Germans from finding out the landing date or position was amazingly successful. Many plots were hatched to deceive them, such as having a corpse wash up on the Spanish coast with misleading details of the place and date of the invasion in a pocket of his uniform.

5th Mission 8.6.44 Alencon near Caen,
6hrs 10mins. 6,500 lbs. Night

The target was a railway marshalling yard on the main line from Brittany to Caen. The Wing Commander briefed us prior to this trip. "Now don't waste your bombs, they are very expensive. People work through the night to make them, so make every one a winner". We were careful. Sandy had a nose bleed on this trip and had trouble getting his oxygen mask off to wipe the blood away because of the four pairs of gloves that he wore-one silk, one

cotton, one woollen and one leather. He failed to get a wound stripe for this! Arriving back we found our aerodrome covered by low cloud and so we were diverted to Caithness. There was cloud there also and too many aircraft milling around so we headed out to sea, and gradually lost altitude, with everybody keeping a sharp watch out, until at about twenty feet we could see the water below us. We went skimming along just above the water like a speedboat (only three times faster) and leaving a wake behind us. Then we turned and headed back to the coast. Bill said, "Keep an eye out for the cliffs!" We saw them about a hundred yards away and Bill managed to pull up over them. Then we saw Lisset aerodrome off to the left so Bill did a sharp turn. Don fired a red flare and we landed on the grass with very little fuel to spare as the dials showed empty. Two crews crashed because of lack of fuel. They were piloted by W/O Jerkyll who crashed at Wassand near Catfoss and all of the crew were killed. P/O S Sambell ordered the crew to bail out and put the plane into "George" the automatic pilot and bailed out himself over Carnaby, all of the crew escaped uninjured. They had both been Gardening (Laying Mines). I don't know which was the worst flying over German anti-aircraft instillations or wandering around Britain in a fog looking for a place to land with empty tanks and not sure where the hills were. Sandy had a knife that had been beautifully hand made for him by a friend. He left it in the plane as we landed and when we went back to fly back to Pocklington someone had stolen it and he was most upset.

6th Mission 11.6.44 Massy Palaiseau, near Paris,
4hrs 25mins. Night.

The target was a railway centre close to Paris. It was a very quiet trip. We stuck to track, but the cloud prevented us finding our target. Even so we were early as there had been a tail wind of some considerable speed, so we had to circle around to fill in time before the Master Bomber arrived. This was pretty dangerous as there were collisions everywhere. Near Paris we were instructed by the master bomber to reduce height to 3,000 ft. and we did this in less than four minutes. It was pretty scary too as there was thick cloud around us. We still could not see the target so we took all our bombs back home, even though it was dangerous to land with a full bomb load on board, but it was too expensive to dump them in the channel. Flight Sergeant Singleton and his crew were the only ones lost from our squadron, but 28 aircraft of the 337 sent failed to return. He crashed in the early hours near Autheuil nine miles north of Evreux, France.

Bill was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross after this trip. He graciously informed us that, although he had been given the award, it was for all of us and that we would be given one later on. Very few sergeants were given medals, whereas almost all officers in our crew received an award after six or more trips.

7th Mission 15.6.44 Evrecy, a village 10miles SW of Caen,
5hrs 5mins. 10,000lbs bombs. Night.
21 planes were sent. One was badly damaged.

The 12th Panzer Division, one of the crack German Divisions, was gathered there and was threatening to hold up the advance of the invading troops. We had trouble getting to the target as it was so well defended by fighters. We had to take evasive action as we were attacked by one of the many of the fighters that were milling around . One of our squadron

was so badly hit that the navigator bailed out. The pilot managed to bring the rest of the crew back. The navigator returned to the squadron soon afterwards. We saw a great deal of the activity of the second front and we bombed very close to our own troops but we were careful to be right on the target.

Air Commander Donald Bennett, who came from Queensland, created and was in charge of the Pathfinders, a specially trained group of experienced second tour crews who dropped coloured markers onto the target. They also provided a Master Bomber who flew at a low level and instructed the bomb aimers.". "Newhaven" was the code name for visual ground markers, "Parramatta" when markers were dropped by H2S (a radar device enabling us to see the ground through cloud), and "Wanganui" when sky markers were used.

Bennett was the most highly trained navigator in the R.A.F. and was also trained as a wireless operator and gunner. When he had created the pathfinders and had it properly organised, Bomber Harris had wanted to put an English officer in charge but the Australian Air force heads in London kicked up such a fuss they let him stay on as the head man. Bennet was shot down over Norway on his first tour and escaped through Sweden assisted by a man who had lived in Australia.

8th Mission 16.6.44 Sterkrade in the Ruhr,
4 hrs 55mins. 6,000lbs bombs Night.
23 aircraft were sent 5 failed to return.

This was our first trip to Germany. A rather disturbing sight at the briefing was to see the ribbon stretching right across the map of Europe. We were to bomb at 20,000 feet. The Wing Commander pointed out that the red areas marked on the map indicated heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns. The target was a synthetic oil plant that turned out to be a spectacular sight as great walls of fire shot up into the air. The pathfinder force was made up of experienced crews who had completed a tour. They flew over the target dropping flares and then issuing orders such as, "Bomb 100 yards to the left of the green flares". This was particularly helpful on a cloudy night but tonight was so clear it was hardly necessary. I did not envy the master bomber or his deputy who had to fly low over the target and keep circling it during the raid while we dropped our bombs all around them. They also made a good target for the anti-aircraft gunners. It was a great deal more dangerous to fly right over the target bombing carefully, but Don took great care to bomb effectually. After dropping the bombs, we needed to keep straight and level for what seemed like an eternity so that the photographs would be accurate. The searchlight crews would work together to cone an aircraft. The master light would catch you first, then two "slaves", enabling them to accurately fix the height and direction, they would then place a shot right where you would be when the flak arrived. Once coned an aircraft would seldom escape. There were German fighters everywhere. We lost our Flight Commander on this trip. The Signals Leader and Gunnery Leader were in his crew.

Two other squadrons in Four Group lost six and seven planes each. Our squadron lost five. We escaped two fighter attacks because Sandy was able to direct the necessary evasive action and fire his four Browning machine guns at the fighters. A total of 32 aircraft (10% of the force) were lost on this trip. F/O Maxwell crashed in Germany and was killed with all of his crew. A fighter near the Dutch coast shot down F/S Kelso and he and his crew were all killed. F/S Braddock was attacked by a fighter and shot down. All were killed.

Squadron Leader Fisher, who was a much-decorated pilot on his second tour, crashed into the sea and all of the crew were killed. Sgt. Barr was shot down by a fighter and was killed, along with the rest of his crew with the exception of his navigator, who became a POW. There was a flak ship anchored off the coast that was shooting at us very accurately on our return journey.

Bas was so occupied with his navigating duties that he had little time to worry about what was happening, whereas Don, the bomb aimer, would be lying on his stomach looking down and would see much more than the rest of us. We saw several planes shot down and some of the German fighters.

On the way back Bill called to me on the intercom and said, "Harry get me one of those flares hanging up near the escape hatch. No, just the cap off one will do. I'm busting". I unplugged my oxygen lead and pulled out the jack from the wireless set and got Bill the cap. There is a chute next to my position through which I drop aluminium strips to confuse the German radar systems, but this time I used it to empty the cap. I only hope that there was someone deserving underneath!

On the signals office wall there was a large blackboard with the names of each of the wireless operators and the number of trips that they had done. It was very satisfying to see my name eventually having the most trips marked against it. For a long time we were the most experienced crew on the squadron.

Even though the R.A.F. was able to destroy so many enemy aircraft after the fateful Nuremberg raid, we lost 1,946 Australian airmen in the second half of 1944, as against 2,272 in the first six months. Bomber Harris decided that after 'D' Day the missions were not as risky so we had to do more trips to finish our tour. As you can see it was only slightly less risky. The total for the year was greater than the losses for the previous years: 3,798 in 1943; 3,058 in 1942; 850 in 1941 and 128 in 1940. Contrary to general opinion, twice as many wireless operators were killed during the war than air gunners - 2,328 Wireless Operators and 1,210 Air Gunners. There were 3,486 Australian airmen killed in Bomber Command and 191 in Fighter Command. In total 55,000 British Commonwealth aircrew died and 78,000 USAAF were killed in this theatre.

19.6.44

This trip was abandoned on route. We were recalled by a radio message about thirty minutes after takeoff. The Wing Commander had the signals Leader as his Wireless operator, but he failed to receive the recall, so they went quite a distance before realising that they were on their own and turned back. Not a word was said to the Signals Leader but I bet he was mortified by his mistake. After all this was one of the most important jobs we had in the crew. This and the sending of "Mayday" distress signals if we were in big trouble. Another job we had was to send back to base the wind speed and direction worked out by the more experienced navigators so that the others would have a double check. This trip was not counted in the number that we had to do to complete our tour.

9th Mission 24.6.44 Noyelle,
3hrs 45mins. Daylight

The target was a large storage depot and a reserve of troops situated near Caen and not far from our own troops. We were now feeling more like a seasoned crew instead of a bunch

of amateurs. We aimed to destroy German supplies of food, petrol and ammunition to prevent them from operating efficiently. The raids that we were making were having a marked effect on their morale as well. We faced very heavy antiaircraft fire as we crossed the coast and again over the target. They were particularly accurate when we flew in the daytime. A piece of flak smashed the windscreen in front of Bill's face and narrowly missed hitting him. It is a bit unsettling when close encounters occurred. Sometimes we got to feel that it was all a dream, from which we would eventually awaken.

We did not go on the trip to Blainville on the 25th of June but several of our squadron did. Sergeant John Watkins was a navigator in Sergeant K Robinson's crew. They crashed after they had been shot up by a fighter and crashed in France where all of the crew were killed except him and a gunner who were made prisoners of war.

10th Mission 27.6.44 Mont Candon. South of Dieppe
3hrs 25mins. Night.

The target was a flying bomb site. The V1 bombs were launched from ramps and aimed at London and other towns in the south of England. On the night of 15th June 1944, 55 sites were able to despatch nearly 250 missiles of which 73 landed on London. They were very damaging to property and were terrorising the public including the Australian airmen on leave in London. I discovered that some beds in London hotels were too low to get under and some trains leave very early in the morning. I was very glad to catch a train to North Wales when this happened. I don't know which is worse, being bombed or dropping them.

The V1 or buzz bomb carried one tonne of explosive and landed indiscriminately on London mainly. 2,500 were dropped altogether killing 9,000 and maiming for life another 25,000 Later an improved larger V11 that was 46 feet long and had a different form of propulsion was sent. 2,000 British and American aircrew were killed attacking the launching sites. 617 Squadron destroyed the larger still V111 bombsite before any were sent. It was heart rending to see beautiful centuries old churches, children's schools, hospitals and homes destroyed by this indiscriminate bombing. It was the reason that I did not feel worse about dropping bombs on Germany at the time. Some of the Typhoon pilots managed to tip their wings so that they were diverted away from London. I hate to think what would have happened if the V111 site had not been destroyed.

11th Mission 28.6.44 Blainville Sur L'eau,
6hrs 55mins. Night.

The target was marshalling yards near the French/Swiss border not far from Strasburg. It was the end of June and mid-summer. The evenings were long and pleasant so it was quite light when we took off. A number of villagers from Pocklington who were out walking stopped on the main road, which was at the end of the runway, to see us off. In the briefing room we had seen the map with its coloured thread stretched across France to the German border. The master bomber instructed us to bomb the upward edge of the rising smoke. Marshalling yards such as this were extremely important because they disrupted the flow of ammunition and troops and deprived the rocket launching sites of rockets and other essentials. The photographs taken after the fires were out showed extensive cratering and great damage to storage depots. Sandy sighted four fighters; two attacked us and he probably shot down one. What with Sandy's shooting and Bill's evasive action we managed

to escape. The River Seine was clearly visible as were the railway sidings. On the way back a stream of bullets could be seen whizzing passed the port wing. Sandy gave the fighter a long burst and he peeled off in another direction.

As the Allies advanced the anti aircraft gunners moved further and further inland and the firing became more concentrated. There were 202 aircraft on this raid. Of the 20 that were sent from our squadron, we lost 5. This was a bad month for us as we lost 16 crews. F/S Campbell, P/O Rogers, P/O Mulvaney, Sgt. Jardine and Sgt. Robinson were among those missing-in-action Harry Rogers' crew only had three more trips to go before they would have finished their tour and could have gone home. F/S. L.K.Whellum The Wireless Operator was the only one in his crew to survive and was made a POW.

My position in the aircraft was below the pilot, while the navigator sat in front of me, and the bomb aimer in front of him. I sat surrounded by equipment-transmitter and receiver in front, and to my left, the "Fishpond" a type of radar that enabled me to see aircraft below. A little green dot moving erratically on the cathode ray screen indicated a fighter. When the Germans introduced upward firing guns it was more difficult to tell as they would just fly beneath and fire at our exhausts, which were easy to see as they glowed red. I also had a radio direction finding aerial. It was not that accurate. When we had 'G' it was not used often. I also had to listen every half hour to our to our station frequency for any messages they might send. If there were fog over our drome then they would send us to another, which was fog free. Some dromes were equipped with FIDO (Fog, Intensive, Disposal of). This was very expensive as it took huge amounts of kerosene fuel to clear the fog from a landing strip. I for one did not think about the expense when we were trying to land in a fog. Dromes equipped with it were few and far between. Changes in the atmospheric pressure were also sent so that the pilot could adjust the altimeter. Failure to do this sometimes led to crashing into a hill. Of course if we were about to ditch into the sea, we had to send out distress signals showing our position. We carried a portable radio; it had a handle to wind to generate the power to operate it. There was a kite so that we could send the aerial up into the air. I had to carry it to the dingy if we landed in the sea. I also had a hot air hose for heating any six square inches of my body I chose.

Sandy sat in his gun turret at the rear end of the plane. He wore a suit similar to an electric blanket, with elements sewn into the fabric. Once plugged in he was as warm as toast. He had to be careful not to touch his guns without his four pairs of gloves on as his hand would stick to them and not come off without leaving his skin on the metal. He could bail out by turning his turret around and falling backwards but this was not to be recommended as his parachute was stowed inside the plane.

Bas, our navigator, had "G", an oscilloscope that received radio messages from three aerials situated in three different parts of England. Three different coloured lines crossed the screen, and along each line were several blips. He had to take the time, count the blips and plot his position on a special map. He would carry out this routine and keep us on course every six minutes. He had twelve very sharp pencils so he was a very accurate worker and the width of a pencil line could make a difference to our position. It was a great day when he found a shop that had metal protectors, which he was able to place over his ever so sharp pencils. The idea was to stay in the centre of the stream and let those on the edge and those who were tagging along behind have the job of fending off the fighters. He also had "Y", a radar device, on which the ground showed up as a green area when crossing

a large city or a coastline. It was only of use if you had a pretty good idea of your position but it was useful to have confirmation of this.

Some said that H2S stood for hydrogen sulphide, which is an extremely smelly gas, but it was first called "Home Sweet Home" as it was used to home in on the target. However the powers that be called it H2S as it sounded more scientific. An experienced navigator like Bas could use it to good effect.

John Allen, our engineer, stood behind Bill and watched the gauges and balanced the fuel so that one side would not be heavier than the other. He also had to watch the oil temperatures, as the cold outside temperatures would cause the oil to coagulate. The pilot would be told to increase the revs to 2500rpm to bring the oil flowing again, otherwise disaster. For every thousand feet we gained in height the temperature dropped two and a half degrees centigrade.

He would also watch our fuel consumption so that we would have enough fuel if we were diverted when we arrived back in a fog. He had been an aircraft engine mechanic before he volunteered for aircrew and was in the permanent Air Force. At the completion of our first tour he was given a commission and continued on with us for a second tour. This was a great promotion for him, as seldom do other ranks ground staff become officers in the RAF.

Charlie Hood, our mid upper gunner, was very quiet and very young. After a small bomb was dropped from above by one of our own aircraft and only just missed him he went LMF (Lack Of Moral Fibre) and was sent to punishment camp where he was stripped of his rank and his AG Wing removed and after serving some time in a prison was given a dishonourable discharge. Most of us were more frightened that this would happen to us than we were of being killed.

One thing about the Air Force that was different to the Army and Navy was that once we were on operations we were not subject to the strict discipline that they were .No sergeant shouting at us every minute of the day telling us what to do. We had to be self disciplined otherwise the safety of the crew would be jeopardised. In the other services the officers did not mix socially with the other ranks as we did.

Bill mostly went on leave with Don and visited us at "Currypool" once. We generally went out together as a crew when on a 48-hour pass. Several times we went together on longer leaves.

Sandy and I went to London on leave. We were given ten days leave every seven weeks as well as forty-eight hour passes from time to time. At Australia House, a meeting place for Australians in London, we were told we could make an appointment to see Lady Francis Rider for afternoon tea and that she would make arrangements for us to spend our leave with an English family. She lived in an airy apartment in a large white terraced building in Chelsea. Another guest that was there was Miss McDonald of the Isles. This is where I learned to balance a cup and saucer and a small plate with a little cake on it and not spill anything or drop crumbs on the Persian carpet. Lady Francis asked us what we would like to do and where we would like to go. Sandy said, "Anywhere, as long as the food is good". She suggested a farm in Somerset, so after sipping our tea and eating our cake nicely while balancing them on our knees, we set off to Bridgewater by train.

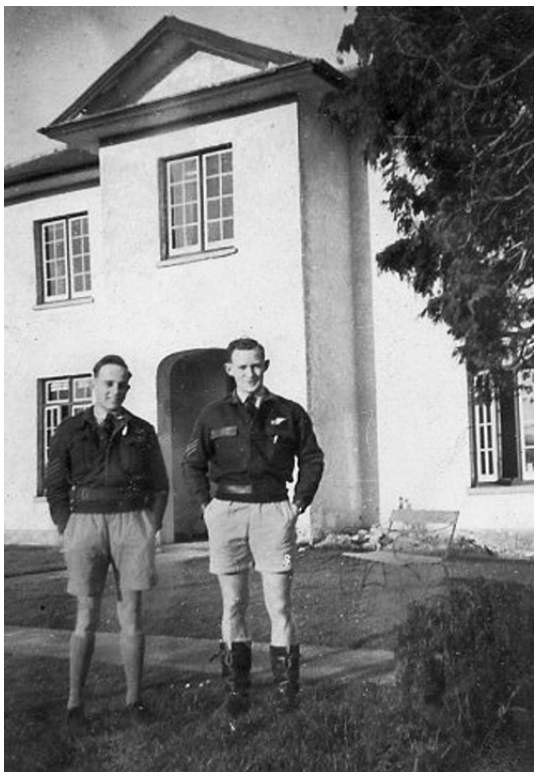
We were met there by a young man who was just a little older than we were. He was a

picture of heath, with fair curly hair, blue eyes. He was a real Saxon. His name was Metford Jeans, the youngest son of the farmer.

We drove towards Minehead as far as Cannington, west of Bridgwater, and along some narrow lanes to the Jean's farm, "Currypool". We drove through a gate in a stone wall, passed a pond, in which a family of ducks swam and along a driveway into a square in front of a two-story farmhouse. It had been rendered to make all of the renovations that had been done over the years appear almost modern.

It was a very old stone building, which had been extended several times in its six hundred year history. We were introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Jeans, brother Frank, sister Ann and cousin Doreen who were all as rosy cheeked and bouncing with energy as Metford except Mr. Jeans who was not too well. Three older children were married and lived in their own farms. Mr. Jeans had paid a deposit on a farm for each of them (including Dolly whose husband was a Welsh bank teller and hopeless at farming) and they were paying off the mortgage.

. Dolly's husband would spend his day riding with their two daughters or some other gentlemanly pursuit while Dolly would do all the work as well as managing the farmhands. He was a delightful fellow; full of fun and very entertaining. Prior to these three leaving home they had run a farm equipment repair business and a cheese factory.



Harry Brabin & Sandy Concannon

Sandy and I were keen to explore the farm. There was a dairy where the cows were milked, an apple orchard with chicken houses on wheels dotted among the trees, pig pens, and a long stone building with a stone floor. This was an old fashioned machine shop, powered by an old water mill. Attached to a long shaft were leather belts driving many ancient machines including grindstones, manglewurter grinders, circular saws and cheese

stirrers. It was a pity that it was not turned into a museum. Attached to the side of the farmhouse were some three pigpens and stalls where lambs that had lost their mothers were kept. Ann would be able to give them a bottle and keep her eye on them. They always had plenty of straw, so the chickens thought that this was a good place to lay their eggs. Ann would know where to look. I was amazed that she could find where they laid their eggs so easily. Some of the out buildings were not attached to the farmhouse and were made of stone that had been built without cement, but were as sturdy now as they were when they were built centuries ago.

Frank, however, (the second youngest son) inherited the farm and pulled down all of the historical parts including the outhouses and had the place modernised. Frank would drive the tractor all day while Metford did all the rest of the work on the farm. He got rid of the milking herd and anything that involved hard work when his father died.

They had a young chap named David who was learning to be a farmer living there. He was considered as one of the family. He would have been called a Jackeroo in Australia.

I think that he had just left school but he was quite a strong young lad. He would come with us to the Young Farmers meetings.

Ann Jeans, Harry Brabin, Mrs Jeans, Sandy Concannon & Doreen

There were a number of searchlights scattered around Somerset. Apart from spotting enemy aircraft for the anti aircraft gunners they were a great help for trainee pilots and navigators who were lost. The aircraft would circle the light and the light would be turned in the direction of the nearest airdrome.

There were two barrage balloon sites over aircraft factories located at Yeovil and Weston-Super-Mare. It was not the balloon itself but the cable that held it that was dangerous.

We had bolt cutters attached to the wings so that we could cut the cables if we did hit one. Fortunately this never happened to us.

There were several Italian prisoner of war soldiers who worked on the farm from time to time. Sandy and I found them quite friendly. Their heart was not in the fighting from the

start and I think that they were rather pleased to be out of it in one piece. Some were from the north of Italy and were not pleased to have to work with southern Italians. They were taller and fairer than the southerners.

Metford told us about a Horsa glider that was being towed over Somerset on "D"Day"when it dived vertically into the ground carrying the two crew and 21 men of the Royal Engineers to their deaths.

Around the farmhouse were a number of large stone outhouses, and further away several two storied cottages, which housed the farm labourers. They looked so quaint but they were very primitive inside. Some of the labourers viewed us very suspiciously as they did not like foreigners. This included anyone from ten miles away, let alone from Australia, wherever that was. Eventually we were able to talk to some of them and get some sort of understandable response. The dialect that they spoke was very difficult to understand. However the more we heard them the more we understood, sometimes we needed a translation from one of the farmer's family.

Each field had an old English name so that they knew which one was to be planted or ploughed next, some of them were rather quaint. Drainage was by agricultural pipes running into ditches and then into the little stream that ran through the farm. There was a full time job in digging the ditches out and cutting back the hedges for some of the workers.

Behind the large kitchen was another larger one and it was used for rousting pigs or whole oxen in a huge open fireplace. Above this kitchen was a room reached by a ladder and used for storing apples, herbs, bottled fruit and vegetables.

I was really impressed by the way they managed their finances. The ladies of the family had to earn the housekeeping money from the sale of eggs. They grew all of their own vegetables and herbs in the kitchen garden. A butcher came occasionally to kill a pig or calf.

Ann took us on a tour of the four hundred acre farm. I was enchanted with the old water wheel (twelfth century), and the cider cellars which contained huge wooden casks of cider and apple presses made in the middle ages. The floor was made of cobblestones and it was quite eerie down there. I wondered about the farmers of long ago who built it. We went looking for eggs and found them in the most unexpected places. Ann took us down to the old village church to arrange the flowers for the Sunday service. She taught me how to clean out the milking shed and carry the dung mixed with straw to a compost pile.

We filled buckets of water from the stream and sluiced and swept the cement floor until it was perfectly clean.

Metford showed us how to climb up hay ricks on a ladder to cut flops of hay one yard square with a special long bladed knife, and carry them over to the stalls on our heads, held with a rope: two legs under a pile of hay! Metford's neck grew an extra inch during winter, and it returned to normal in the summer.

The cattle were placed in stalls during winter; in a special a special pecking order so that they would get enough food as some of the cattle would eat the food in front and on either side if they were stronger than their neighbours. They were graded by placing them in a yard and bringing them face to face with one another to find which one was to look away first. The order could be adjusted if necessary. The head cow, Daisy, had been orphaned when she was born and had been raised and bottle fed by Ann. She was the first to leave

the cow stalls in the morning and led the herd back in the evening. She still came to Ann to be patted whenever she saw her. On the other hand, everyone always treated Pilot the bull with great respect. Especially by me. When I went to clean out his stall I always carried a pitchfork, and I would not do it alone. Ann had to be there too. I was amazed at the amount of work Ann was able to do. She milked twenty cows every day. Of course they had machines but the cows had to be stripped by hand. The stalls had to be cleaned and the old straw with the droppings had to be put on the compost heap. Then she had to wash them out with buckets of water carried from the stream and scrubbed. New straw had to be fetched and placed on the floor.

Ann Jeans, the farmer's daughter

She had to feed the thirty or so fowls and collect their eggs. She also helped her elderly mother cook for ten people and do most of the housework. When they were harvesting she had to help stooking the hay and pitchforking it onto the back of a wagon. She looked after any sick animals such as young calves or lambs and hand fed them. She would feed the pigs with scraps from the table, plus anything else needing done about the place. When I was there I would help her and it was really hard work just being her assistant. She was always very even tempered, and had a happy disposition.

Sandy and I joined the local Young Farmers Club and engaged in their activities. Being a country boy, Sandy was quite at home there and on the farm, but as a city boy I had a lot to learn. I could not keep up with the girls stooking hay or pitching it up onto the back of the wagon. However, after so much unaccustomed physical work, I did manage to match their appetites. The midday meal was usually roast beef, lamb or pork, followed by apple

dumplings covered with clotted cream and washed down with their own cider. Sandy and I were more than satisfied with this wonderful food after our meagre Air Force rations. Sometimes Sandy hunted rabbits and seldom came back without several.

While we were staying at "Currypool" We heard that a Dornier made a daylight raid on Yeovil a nearby town and dropped five bombs directed at the Westland Aircraft works; most of the bombs missed the target and exploded in a residential area, killing eight people and injuring thirty six. Twelve houses were demolished and about ninety damaged.

A mother had raced to the nearby school to pick up her five-year-old son and took him home. The house received a direct hit and both mother and son were killed. The school was untouched.

Ann was a good teacher getting me to learn how to back a tractor with a trailer full of manure and place it near the dung heap. It was a while before I learnt the knack. I had to take it fairly slowly as I did not want to damage any of the farm buildings. After a while it seemed to be second nature as everything slotted into place. Then I was allowed to do it unsupervised. There were so many things that I had to learn. Sandy was much more adept than I was.

Addendam

After the war, when my wife and I visited for the second time in 1993, we called on the family and found that Metford had purchased the estate of Lord Beaverbrook for £2,500,000. It was quite near the farm he already had. He then divided it up into three large farms and several small-holdings of about five acres suitable for gentlemen who wanted a place in the country where they could keep a few horses. He had the farmhouses remodelled and the properties fenced and either leased or sold for a substantial profit. He also had a farm machinery warehouse where he sold new machines and tractors as well as a second hand place where he could sell the trade-ins. He rented the ancient mansion called "Stowey Court",a 1480's home to the Farm Institute for Students. He built a beautiful two-story house on one of the farms he had bought and was in the process of planting out the garden with trees and a yew hedge around the large ornamental pool. The glassed sunroom in the middle of the front of the house is a clever addition to a very spacious home. Metford took us for a walk around the estate, the manor and to see his older sister, Dolly, who lived in a cottage near the manor. He put us up for several days and took us for a tour of the county. He also had a trout farm and a large piggery. A by-product from the piggery was methane gas, which he used to generate electricity for his own use as well as for those farms he had sold.

The main business Metford had was a cheese factory called Cricketer's Arms. This was on the main road and was opened to the public where they could see the cheese being made from a glassed in viewing platform. They made a large variety of cheese that they sold all over the south of England.

One day Ann took Sandy and me to Dunster. We turned off the main road and up a narrow street to a village with quaint stone fronted shops around Central Square with an old stone lace market in the middle. On a hill tucked away between the trees was a pigeon house with a revolving ladder. Dunster Castle was very interesting. The Luttrel family had bought it in 1376 and their descendents had occupied it ever since. The floor of the main hall has several inches of shell grit under the floorboards, and this deadens the sound of the dancers. The front door is riddled with bullet holes filled with lead from Cromwell's time. There are gutters cut in the stone above the main doorway where molten lead could be poured onto anyone trying to batter the door down. The village green is situated behind the castle and there is a little stream where cricketers can quench their thirst. I thought it the most beautiful of all of the villages that I saw in England. The street is filled with quaint little shops with an old-fashioned flower mill at the back. There is also an ancient dovecot on a nearby hill.

At one time, Lady Francis Rider sent me to stay with the Mayor of Warwick. He was huge as were his wife and children also. The furniture and fittings in their home were much larger than normal. When I sat on the toilet my feet were a foot from the floor. It was a charming house with many bay windows and comfortable chairs and little nooks with writing desks and bookcases in them. The garden was also lovely, with many rose gardens and rose covered trellises.

The family played Royal Tennis using a heavy racquet, which I found difficult to lift; let alone hit a ball with. They had lived in Australia for some time before the war in Adelaide.

Warwick is in the centre of the inland waterways system and it is possible to travel by river or canal to London, Bristol, Liverpool, Gloucester and York. We toured Warwick Castle and they told me of the history of the area. Huge defences had been built in the Middle Ages, including two massive towers: Caesar and Guy. The castle was built by William the Conqueror and converted into a mansion by Sir Fulke Greenville who was given the place by James I. Capability Brown designed the grounds. A huge vase unearthed from Hadrian's Villa outside Rome is displayed in the greenhouse. I was introduced to the Earl of Warwick when we were there and he told us about the fire that had destroyed a large part of the town about three hundred years ago. He showed us several old carriages in the basement that he was going to restore to their former glory after the war. It was all pretty dusty and I imagined all sorts of dastardly deeds that may have been perpetrated there. This castle had been there so long and the occupants so involved in the history of England. It gave me a strange feeling, here I was talking to a direct descendant of so many famous men

12th Mission 12.7.44 Les Hauts Buissons,SE of Paris
4hrs 10mins. Night

The target was a flying bomb site. At the briefing, the Wing Commander had stressed the importance of accurate bombing as these sites were causing so much damage. We piled into the van with all of our gear and were driven out to our aircraft. We joked with the three ground staff boys who looked after the mechanics of the plane, then climbed into the hatch halfway along the fuselage. We sat at our positions while they were testing the engines and

then went back to our take off positions. At the end of the runway we waited our turn until given the OK to take off from the control tower. Bill put on the brakes and revved the engines, then took off the brakes and we built up speed for take-off. It was always an anxious time as we were fully loaded with petrol and up to 13,000 lbs of bombs, so there was a feeling of relief as we slowly lifted up and flew over the hedge at the end of the runway. We gained height and met up with the rest of the bomber stream over the Wash, north of London, then over the Channel to the French coast. Fortunately the coastal defences had been captured by our troops so we did not face the devastating fire as we crossed into France that we usually faced. However the Germans had moved their guns inland so that the flak over the target was more concentrated than ever. We were successful in destroying the launching pad, the rocket dump and some of their anti-aircraft guns as well.

Wing Commander S.J. Marchbank D.F.C. was promoted to Group Captain and posted to another squadron and replaced by Wing Commander M.D. Wilson D.F.C. A.F.C. I for one was sorry to see Marchbank go as he was more personable and much more approachable than his successor.

13th Mission 17.7.44 Bois de la Haie,
4hrs. Daylight.

This was our second daylight Mission, and we found it quite frightening to see so many aircraft over the target dropping hundreds of bombs, and many passed very close to us. On the way back Sandy called, "Corkscrew port". A fighter was on our tail. We dived steeply for a few moments then climbed just as steeply to starboard then dived to port again, up and down, on and on until my stomach was refusing to follow the planes gyrations. All the while Sandy was shooting bursts at the fighter and he eventually gave up and peeled off. We did not need to take our "Wakey-wakey" pills to stay awake on that raid, nor our "sleepy sleepy" pills when we returned. It was a great surprise to me how superstitious many of the aircrew were. Some would not fly without a special scarf or some other talisman with them.

There were some spectacular escapes from imminent death by air force personnel. A bomber pilot who fell nearly two miles without a parachute at night was able to grab the legs of another member of his crew and they both landed safely with minor injuries. The rear gunner whose legs they were, asked his pilot to let go when they were near the ground. He did not have to worry as they fell into a tree. A Lancaster and a Halifax collided over the target and both aircraft caught fire and fell into another Halifax; 21 men died but the pilot of the Lancaster survived.

An air gunner fell 18,000 feet without a parachute and landed on the steep slope of a snow-covered mountain and suffered only a slight shock. He had some trouble convincing his German captors of the truth of his story until he took them to the place where he had fallen.

When an airman managed to escape and return to England he was sent around to the various camps so that he could tell his story to other airmen so we heard first-hand many of the stories that eventually became published years later.

R.A.F. Intelligence officers collected information on Luftwaffe pilots to be used for interrogation purposes if they were ever to become prisoners in England. Some of this information was gleaned from captured German air gunners; many of them had been mess

orderlies prior to being told that they were gunners. Many details of the officers' personal lives were later used to induce them to divulge useful military information. One officer was told the name of his dog and the name of the lady he was seeing despite being married to another. A little blackmail was used to good effect.

Von Werra, a German prisoner of war, was detained in a camp in the Lake District and escaped by jumping over a stone fence at the bend in a lane while on a route march. He waited until his fellow prisoners distracted the guards and then escaped into a copse of trees. He was caught several days later by two Home Guardsmen but escaped again. He was recaptured after four days and sent to another prison where he again escaped with four others by digging a tunnel under the fence. This time he was captured while sitting in a new Hurricane fighter, posing as a Dutch ferry pilot, and ordering a mechanic to get a starting trolley. He was then sent to Canada. One of his fellow escapees was recaptured when he clicked his heels together and bowed upon being handed a bus ticket. The conductor told the driver to pull up when he saw a policeman. The German had a suitcase full of chocolate he was hoping to take back to Germany.

Von Werra escaped again in Canada by jumping from a slow moving train into a snowdrift. He made his way to a road where he hitched a ride in a police car to Johnstown on the St. Lawrence River, pretending to be a Polish seaman. He stole a rowboat and crossed at night to Ogdensburg in the United States and gave himself up to the police (U.S.A. was still neutral in 1940). Then he was sent to New York where the German Consul organized his escape through Mexico. There he took a plane to Rome and then to Berlin. He was able to reveal to the German intelligence very useful information on British interrogation methods, which was then relayed to German airmen.

One very successful British trick was to plan a route to London from where the prisoner was taken through areas that were not bomb damaged. The escort party would drop in for lunch at a pub along the way at which they had previously stocked up with food and drink. The prisoner would think that all of the pubs were equally well supplied. This undermined their conviction that England was reeling under German bombing.

The Germans fired an experimental V2 rocket, which landed in Sweden where it fell to the ground. The Swedes sent the unexploded bomb to England where they were able to determine its characteristics. When they realized how destructive it was they started to make determined attacks on their launching sites and factories that produced them.

At Australia House in London I saw a pilot who had been badly burnt on the face and hands, I recognized him as a fellow who used to travel on the same train to the city as I did before the war. He was covered in scar tissue, not a pretty sight. I saw him many years later in Sydney. He looked quite distinguished and successful and his facial skin was quite smooth. It was wonderful the way doctors had treated the burn victims.

Our squadron had airmen from every part of the British Isles so we became quite expert in detecting where they came from by their accents. I was surprised at the number of Scottish accents, and I thought "educated Edinburgh" was one of the best. I was friendly with an airman whose father was Scottish and his mother Welsh. He could speak in either

accent, or in standard southern English, which he used with great effect in the review he compeered for the theatrical group. We had several South African pilots who spoke with their distinctive accent, quite a few New Zealanders and Canadians, and even a black airman from the Caribbean. On leave we were able to match up the accents we heard in different towns with someone on the squadron. For example, everyone in Liverpool spoke like Nobby Clark!

There was a young Scottish air gunner on the squadron who spoke with a beautiful accent and looked so fresh, fair and healthy that it looked as though a light shone within. He went on leave just before the final trip of his tour and decided to get married then and there. However, he did not return from his last trip much to our sorrow and also to his new bride I dare say. It is his face that I always remember when I hear the "Last Post" played.

I met two English Gunners in the mess who were telling me that they were train spotters. One had slightly ginger hair and freckles the other was quite fair too. They had been trainspotters for as long as they could remember. When they went on leave they would have the name of some obscure village written on their rail pass and spend their time travelling all over England, visiting railway workshops and photographing engines. They would also rummage around in waste bins looking for discarded instruments and take them back to the squadron and spend hours in the workshops trying to repair them. One of them had a girl-friend in the photograph section that would print out their photos for them. They had shoeboxes full of them with details written on the back. I often wondered what they did when the war ended. I bet they did not become bus drivers.

14th Mission 18.7.44 Vaires,
5hrs. Daylight

The target was marshalling yards, about twelve miles south east of Paris. The weather was beautifully clear so that we could see for miles. Mild flak was popping up around us.

We heard to- day about a pilot who was convalescing at the Palace Hotel at Torquay. He had bailed out but his parachute had not opened properly. Fortunately he landed on top of a haystack. He was so impressed with his rescuer, the farmer's daughter that he married her.

In daylight, smoke from the explosive stays in the air for quite some time and builds up in frightening proportions. We were accompanied by Spitfires to defend us. And one of them high above us suffered a direct hit and came spiralling down at great speed, there was no parachute anywhere so I expect that the pilot went down with the aircraft. Considering the amount of flak that was bursting all around us, I was very surprised to see this happen. Not as half surprised as the Spitfire pilot was I should imagine, and even the gunner who shot him down.

The density of the flak built into a great cloud as we neared Paris. We were four minutes early and the target had not been marked by the Pathfinders so we did an orbit just short of the wall of flak then we nipped through the flak belt just short of the Pathfinders and were one of the first to attack. We saw our bombs land right in the centre of the railway yards before the smoke obscured the target. Suddenly the anti-aircraft fire ceased and I breathed a sigh of relief, until a mass of Messerschmitt 109s took over.

The Spitfires had turned for home but when they saw our plight they returned to help us. Each time a ME 109 attacked one of us, a Spitfire would be right behind it. Eventually the fighters left and the ack-ack resumed and the wall of black smoke built up again. I wonder how much fuel the Spitfires had by the time that they landed.

The very well defended target came into view, and we could see ten long goods trains fully laden in the marshalling yards. Some were pulling away as we bombed but they were an easy target. It was much more satisfactory to destroy goods trains than cities full of people. Two Halifax bombers were lost out of the ninety-nine that were sent.

The Wing Commander's Crew
Sgt.C.Pugsley,Sgt.C.Ormsby,F/S H.Hammond W/C L.Wilson,
Sgt.W.Chown,P/O A Bowen,F/O Selby

15th Mission 20.7.44 Chappelle Notre Dame, On the Seine River near Paris
3hrs 25mins. Daylight

As we passed over the Humber estuary other squadrons based in our group joined us and later on we were joined by the Lancasters.We gradually reached our bombing height of 19,000 feet.

Again the target was a railway marshalling yard where there was a concentration of reserves and supplies. 320 aircraft from squadrons 463, 14, 467 and 102 were deployed.

Excellent marking by the pathfinders and master bomber resulted in a good concentration of bombs. Spoof flares were dropped to distract the fighters but this was not very effective.

Five bombers were shot down; 1,650 tons of bombs were dropped; sidings were damaged; the station building was guttered, and a bridge carrying five sets of tracks was demolished. "A jolly good show," the Wing Commander said on our return.

16th Mission 23.7.44 Les Hautes Boissons,
3hrs 25mins. Night

This trip was code-named "Operation Cobra". The plan was to use bombers to saturate an area so that ground forces could break through stiff opposition into Brittany. This was to be a combined operation between Bomber Command and the U.S. Air Force. Each section had a specific target such as tank corps, troop concentrations, artillery, and the job of cratering the ground so that tanks could not make flanking attacks. The crew who we shared our hut with F/O Donald as their pilot, was shot down on the way home. We were flying next to one another. It disappeared in a flash with no evidence of anyone escaping. The fighter then turned on us but Sandy was able to return some very effective fire. All of Donald's crew were killed except the rear gunner, Bob Selth, who was blown out of the plane. Luckily he had his parachute on as he found that he was floating downwards with his parachute open in the middle of the night over the English channel about fifty miles from the coast where an English destroyer saw him floating down and brought him safely on board within twenty minutes. Bob was fortunate to survive so long in the freezing water. The doctor on board wrapped him up in warm blankets and gave him hot drinks. He was hardly affected by this experience physically but mentally, who knows? The following day I was with him in the mess when Wing Commander Wilson rang and told Bob he must fly that night as a replacement for a gunner who had gone sick, with a strange crew Bob did not know. Still in a stage of shock, Bob's impolite refusal was not well accepted. He was to be charged with "lack of moral fibre" and sent to an Air force prison, stripped of his rank, and made to double around the parade ground with a full pack on his back however the Australian headquarters in Kodak House intervened and sent him home to Australia. The irony was that he was of German descent. Sixteen planes were sent from our squadron. The wireless operator was Bob Skeates, from P/O Donald's crew. He was a friend of mine and I was sad that he had been killed. (Buck) Rogers was the mid upper gunner. He had lived in Melbourne where his family was well known and they were particularly upset at his passing.

The pilot F/O H Donald had been going around with a WAF Officer and she was found to be pregnant. She had a son who she brought up to be a very successful businessman.

The people from the Deceased Estate section came around just as I was returning to our hut so that they could take away their crew's belongings. They were taking away my bicycle and I had a hard job convincing them that it was mine until Charley Hood turned up and agreed that it was mine. This is usually done when those that were left were not there. It amazes me these days to see so much in the press when a serviceman is killed. We were not even told where they were buried nor was there any kind of service held in their honour, all the ceremony that took place when a crew went missing, and that was memory.

17th Mission 24.7.44 Stuttgart,
8hrs 30mins. Night

The target was a ball-bearing factory. This was to be our longest Mission 1800 miles At the briefing the Wing Commander said, "We will play a trick on the enemy tonight. We will head towards Manheim so that their fighters will congregate there, and then at the last moment we will turn towards Stuttgart and drop our bombs". This was to be the fifth successive night on which Stuttgart was bombed, and the stream numbered 618. The weather was bad. Masses of German fighters attacked both going in and coming out. We only partly destroyed the factory but another raid a month later completed the job.

We lost one plane from our squadron and F/O Weaver's "F' Freddy" returned badly damaged but with all of the crew unharmed. The total losses on this raid were 63 planes and their crews. Nearly 3,000 Germans were killed or injured in this series of raids.

We were just turning after having bombed the target when Charley our English Mid Upper Gunner called out that another Halifax had turned at the same time and had just missed us by a few feet. The hazards were not confined to enemy fire but to find that our own aircraft could be just as dangerous was something we were just finding out. Being bombed by our own mates was another problem and Bill made sure that we were a little higher than we should be in order to escape that fate. We saw a plane go down in flames. We made a feint towards Mannheim the past Strasburg on to Stuttgart. After leaving the target we dived from 29,000 feet to 6,000 at 240 MPH to evade the enemy night fighters. Thirteen planes went from 102 Squadron of which eleven bombed. There were seven sightings of enemy fighters, two combats and one JU88 destroyed. F/S Page crashed in France and all of the crew were killed.

The density of the flak built into a great cloud as we neared Paris. We were four minutes early and the target had not been marked by the Pathfinders so we did an orbit just short of the wall of flak then we nipped through the flak belt just short of the Pathfinders and were one of the first to attack. We saw our bombs land right in the centre of the railway yards before the smoke obscured the target. Suddenly the anti-aircraft fire ceased and I breathed a sigh of relief, until a mass of Messerschmitt 109s took over. X. We had been thinking that we had a good chance of finishing the tour so now we did not want to become blasé. 'Z' Zebra came back badly damaged with a fighter to its credit. This was cause for some celebration in the officer's mess.

18th Mission 25.7.44 Wanne Eikel near Essen,
4hrs 50mins. Night

The target was in the Ruhr area where the Germans had their greatest concentrations of anti-aircraft installations. The Gunnery Officer told us that two million Germans were engaged in anti-aircraft duties so the anti-aircraft defences were formidable. Most of these guns were in the Ruhr area. It is known as Happy Valley and you are to fly through it all.You will wonder when you see it if you will be able to fly through it, however there is a lot of sky over there so just get on with the job and pray. We slowly commenced making our way to the take off point at the start of the runway and the green flare was fired. Bill

102 Squadron Wireless Operators

Shepherd, Valery, Roach, Seymour, Gallegher,
Gutteridge, Pearson, Wilson, Smith, Walker, Caxten, Smith, MacAuley, Pugsley, Brown,
Clement, Farrer, Jones, Newman, Taylor, Boulton, Oakley, Harris, Peeler,
Thomas, Aitkin, Bond, Brabin, Hadley, Allen, Fry, Brown, Loffleurton

Those underlined were other Wireless Operators that were killed
while I was on the squadron.

.

Those other Wireless Operators who were not in the photograph
and were killed while I was on the squadron are listed below

.

N.Pardon, R.Messer, R.Lucas, R.Skeats, R.Leyland, C.Mathews, J.Finney,
C.Townsend, H.Loche, W.Wilson, E.Bolton, E.Stevens, W.Shaw, L.Carter, P.Hewitt,
J.Smith, G.Grimsdell, W.Bradshaw

opened the throttles and released the brakes and we raced down the runway gathering speed. I sat in the take off position braced against two spars with my hands around my head until we were airborne.

I returned to my seat and let the trailing aerial down and tuned into our squadron frequency. I checked the "Fishpond" to see if it was picking up the planes below us. We were careful to keep a watch on the other aircraft, as there had been several collisions on the way to the target lately. All was well until we reached Germany. The trip was a nightmare! I kept telling myself, "This isn't happening. It's not real. It's just a horror movie I'm watching. I will get up out of my seat and go home in a minute!" During a break Bill called out, "I'll have some coffee, thanks Harry". This request came as a surprise and I thought that if Bill could drink coffee, things could not be as bad as they look. My attention was drawn to the escape kit that we each carried, containing a passport photograph in civilian clothes, two buttons which placed on top of one another would act as a compass, some silk maps of Europe which folded up to almost nothing, chocolate and Horlicks tablets, German money and a German phrase book. I was wondering if I would soon need these items and they began to seem extremely useful. We found the area covered by haze and the flares we were to bomb were very scattered. The pathfinders laid down additional flares to enable us to bomb more accurately. The target was lit up like daylight. Searchlights everywhere along with a huge amount of flak I am amazed that we fly so calmly on after we have bombed just so we are able to take a photo. Many of the planes were hit but we all landed back safely. The Krup synthetic oil production facility was badly damaged and the Hannibal coalmine was destroyed. I think that the loss of German oil production was a big factor in enabling us to win the war.

19th Mission 28.7.44 Foret De Nieppe,
2hrs 30mins. Daylight.

The Wing Commander began his briefing, "A piece of cake, gentlemen. It's just over the French coast. The aim is to help our brave soldiers by bombing tank and troop concentrations and supply centres for V Rocket launches. Today we are full of surprises. Two Mosquitoes will lead our squadron while over 1,000 aircraft will be bombing various targets in the area. These Mosquitoes will be equipped with Oboe and will fly on a great circle arc controlled by radio beacons in England. When they are over the target the signals will cease and the Mosquitoes will drop their flares. You will bomb the flares. Now that is very simple, isn't it?"

The Wing Commander told Bill that as Bill's crew were a lot more experienced than his, we would have the honour of leading the 1,000 bombers. He must have known something as it turned out. As soon as we reached the coast, we were the main targets. We took off and tacked onto the rear of the Mosquitoes with everyone else flying in formation behind us. Flying on a great circle arc without deviating. At Ostend, we were the perfect targets for German anti-aircraft fire. We were hit repeatedly and many of the holes in the fuselage were big enough to jump through. In fact Don was thinking just that, and had picked up his parachute and was strapping it on when Bas told him, "You've got it on upside down". Just then Bas was hit in the leg by a piece of flak. I tore open his trousers and held my thumbs near the wound to try and stop the bleeding. The wound was too close to the groin to use a tourniquet. Sandy came down from his turret with a large sheath knife in his hand. Bill

wondered what he was going to do with it! He cut the trouser leg off as a quantity of blood had collected in a part of the trousers. I kept up the pressure on the vein for the rest of the Mission. My thumbs were pretty sore for days afterwards from having to keep up the pressure. Every now and then I would release the pressure and let him bleed so that the circulation was not stopped altogether. We were near the target so we hurriedly dropped our bombs, as did two aircraft behind us who had been told to bomb when we did. Because of the injury to Bas and the badly damaged aircraft, we wagged our wings and headed home.

The Wing Commander who was flying behind us took up our position behind the Mosquitoes and led the stream to the target. Bill wanted a course to steer. Bas said, "Head due West". Don said, "Give the man a gong for navigating while wounded". We made several attempts to get out of France but each time we were driven back by a wall of flak. Eventually we found a relatively quiet spot and put our nose down to increase our speed and managed to cross with only a few more holes.

We saw an American Lightning flying near so we fired a distress flare and he escorted us back to Great Ashfield, which was a Fortress squadron. I was really happy to be able to hand over the patient to a doctor who came with some orderlies to take Bas to the hospital at Ely. Upon inspection, the plane had eighty holes in it; some of them huge. We had to refuel and, with Don navigating, managed to fly back to Pocklington where our beloved "N" for Nan was repaired.

Fifteen aircraft from our squadron had to be repaired. Several had to land away due to flak damage.

20th Mission 3.8.44 Foret De Nieppe,
3hrs 25mins. Daylight

Harold Hammond, a Kiwi nicknamed "Honk", acted as our navigator. He was a friend of Bas and usually acted as the Wing Commander's Navigator

We were one of five crews chosen to bomb a petrol dump. This suited Don down to the ground and he made a very spectacular show of it; smoke and flames rose thousands of feet into the air. One of our aircraft had its rear turret shot away. We dived after leaving the target to gain speed and flew back at a very low level. Bill loved to do this. We did too when he didn't fly so low that he would have to lift one of the wings to miss a tree!

Bill obtained another stripe to wear on his arm as he was promoted from a Flying Officer to a Flight Lieutenant.

When we were flying out on this operation we came across a strong formation of American Flying Fortresses coming back from a raid over Germany. It was quite impressive to see these planes flying in perfect formation and spread out over fifteen miles escorted by Spitfires, some or the fighters were so high that I could scarcely make them out but for the vapour trails that they left behind them. It was a splendid day and the visibility was near perfect. We could see the farmlands of France spread out like a patchwork quilt below us. The fields were all different colours and the small villages were like dolls houses grouped together. They must have plenty of rain for everything to be so lush. Most of the farms seemed to me to be pretty small. I wondered if they were viable but Sandy said that they grew many crops and had chickens and pigs and a few cows so that they were fairly self-sufficient.

21st Mission 5.8.44 Foret De Dieppe,
3hrs 45mins. Daylight

This was to be our third trip in succession to this target where some Germans were trying to rebuild storage facilities and some warehouses that still remained after the previous bombings,742 aircraft took part. Flight Sergeant McCorkingdale came as our navigator. There was the usual concentration of anti-aircraft fire. After we returned we went to see Bas in Ely hospital. He was making good progress and was obviously well looked after and very popular with the nurses. The piece of flak, which had been removed from his leg, was resting in a little box lined with cotton wool. Being wounded entitled him to wear an insignia on his sleeve.

Another insignia was a little golden silkworm given to airmen who parachuted from a plane. We had been instructed about how to fall etc.but when we asked about a practice jump, we were told that if you don't do it right the first time you don't get another go.

22nd Mission 9.8.44 Foret De Mormal,
3hrs 30mins. Daylight
Five aircraft from our squadron were detailed to attack.

Bas was still in hospital so we flew with a spare navigator. He was a dead loss so we just followed another plane. We were late getting to the target but were surprised when our bombs hit an oil storage tank and made such a spectacular explosion. The Master Bomber was hit by flak but managed to get home OK.

In this area there had been a strong resistance to the Canadian assault by a large concentration of anti-tank guns assisted by the 21st Panza division at Vaucelles. We bombed from 2,000-3,000 ft. against negligible opposition. Smoke screens were put up so we bombed them, dropping 16,000 tons of bombs. Many vehicles and tanks outside the smokescreen were also destroyed. The success of this attack was a morale booster for the Allied troops in the area as they were able to break the stalemate that existed. A great cloud of smoke could be seen as we left.

Around this time the Cherbourg Peninsula was free of Germans. The Allies had settled in and the troops were well supplied, but the Germans had a ring of well-sited defences around them. Neither side had the advantage and it seemed possible that a long drawn out battle would ensue. Air Chief Marshal Leigh Mallory suggested to General Eisenhower that a large bombing force be sent day after day to hamper the Germans. An attack on Caen with 2,500 tons of bombs enabled Canadian troops to surge forward against only weak opposition. The Germans were demoralized by this exercise and the pattern was set for the Allies' advance from then on.

While Sandy and I were staying with the Jeans family in Somerset Bill, Don and Bas came down to visit for the day, and we went cycling around the district. Bill and Don rode a tandem cycle that Metford had lent to them. They fell off it a few times as the country lanes were quite uneven in places No harm was done to them or to the bike.

The lanes were bordered by high hedges to keep the cattle and sheep from straying, so you could not see over them.

On the thirtieth of July DY-U Uncle with Flight Sergeant Hulme as a pilot crashed at Blockley in Gloustershire killing all of his crew including Charles Mathews who was the

wireless operator.

On the thirteenth of August DY-H With Flying Officer Sambell crashed over Rintaln in Germany killing the navigator but the rest of the crew were made prisoners of war.

23rd Mission 31.8.44 Lumbres (SW of Calais),
3hrs 35mins. Daylight.

Bas was back with us for the first time after being wounded. We were very glad to have him back after the experience we had by the last replacement. This was another of a series of trips designed to assist forces during the invasion. It was interesting to pick out the various rivers as we crossed England. The Ouse flows down to the Humber and a different river, called the Great Ouse, flows into the wash at Norfolk. There is the Cam in Cambridge and the Thames flowing from Oxford to London. The last river we saw on this trip was the Great Stour near Ramsgate. Crossing the Channel at Dover we could see that the water was very deep but when we crossed further north, sand banks would appear above the water at low tide. They were often so large and numerous it seemed possible to walk from England to France with only occasional deep channels. These banks shift positions frequently so fishermen need to know the area well. The French coast was fortified with concrete blocks and barbed wire, with anti-aircraft guns clustered along the beaches and headlands every hundred yards or so. Once we were through the coastal defences we could see the beautiful green countryside of rural France, with picturesque rivers and canals. It was not often we flew as low as this and, of course, we did not see much of it at night.

Lumbres was south west of Calais and the junction of several roads that were filled with tanks and troops that were holding up the advance of the allied push. It was only a small French village so we had to be quite accurate so as not to harm the civilians. I am not too sure that we did not do some harm to the surrounding farms.

It was a great pity that we could not be more discerning but the Vichy French were doing terrible thing to the Jews and the Gypsies. Rounding them up and sending them to Germany as forced labourers in the factories. If it was not for the antiaircraft fire it was a pleasant trip home over the picturesque French countryside.

The anti-aircraft fire over the target was severe, as all of the coastal guns had been sent to this area. We bombed and turned for home, feeling relieved that we did not have to face ack-ack guns on the return trip. We suffered from severe icing on the way and met with some heavy snow.

The Germans had bases near the French coast so they could fly to England and bomb large cities without having to fly very far, whereas we had to fly over France and find cities that were much more dispersed. This gave the Germans more time to prepare for us.

There were 9 million people in London who were subject to continuous bombing and they spent many a long hour in air raid shelters.

When I was on leave in London on my own I joined the Overseas Club that was situated near Green Park. You had to enter through a large archway to a courtyard that was pretty old. There was an Indian Room there and many Indian officers would stay there. I had breakfast one morning with an English army Brigadier. We had been talking about the invasion and he wanted to know why I was not an officer. I did not tell him that I had not been to a grammar school.

One day I was given a forty-eight hour leave pass and decided to hitch a ride to York. A gentleman picked me up outside the camp and told me that he had a sister living in Australia but he knew that it is a huge country and that it would be most unlikely that I would know her. "Where does she live", I asked. He replied, "Artarmon". My own family had moved to Artarmon shortly before I had joined up. He said, "She lives in Hampden Road and her husband is a ship's captain". I said, "I have not met them but I know them by sight. I also know the house they live in". Did someone once say it's a small world?

I wandered around the narrow streets in York looking at the old antique shops that were filled with all sorts of ancient treasures some of which I would have liked to buy, but the thought of lugging my kitbags around with any extra weight put me off.

I went to a movie that day. It was "Gone With The Wind" and I thought that it was a great film. Then I went to the bus queue to return to camp. There was snow on the ground and it was bitterly cold. I hugged my greatcoat about me. A young woman clad only in a thin dress and carrying a crying baby joined the queue. I took off my coat and handed it to her. She covered the baby, who then stopped crying. I think this is the bravest thing I have ever done, as I was nearly frozen by the time the bus came.

The other occasion when I was very cold was in Calgary, Canada. A girl I was dating had invited me home to dinner. The snow was six feet deep in some parts and covered the road and footpaths.

I inadvertently left the streetcar at the wrong stop because it was so hard to make out where I was and had to walk through this thick snow to their house and I fell down several times and was covered in snow. When I eventually arrived at her house, I had to wait in the tiny area between the outer door and the inner door so I could thaw out gradually and so avoid the painful swelling of the frozen areas that occurs when the bodyheats up too rapidly after being frozen. I was very glad when they let me in to the warmth!

While most of the people in Britain were in the forces or working in factories doing their best for the war effort there were some who were taking advantage of the situation to feather their own nests. They were referred to as profiteers selling hard to get articles on the black market. Others were going on strike constantly especially in the shipbuilding industry.

In London, on leave with the crew, we decided to go to Soho for a Chinese meal. Most of us had not had one before, as there were very few Chinese restaurants in Australia then. This was to be a new experience for us and it took quite some time to find one that was clean and not too expensive. At last we found one that looked all right. We were shown the menu by an attractive young Chinese girl who explained the courses, but seeing our obvious ignorance she suggested that we try a little of everything. We thought that this was a good idea. She placed the order and came back to give us a lesson on how to use the chop-sticks. We practiced with the sugar cubes until the meal arrived.

She placed a large silver urn in front of Bill. The urn was filled with cabbage leaf parcels containing various dishes and surrounded by boiled rice. She instructed Bill to serve each of us with a parcel from the top layer and some rice. Each layer was a different course, and we were well satisfied by the time we came to the bottom of the urn. Our education had

begun and we often had dinner at Chinese restaurants after this. We also patronized Chinese laundries, which seemed to be in every town. They were the only places where we could get a good shine on our issue collars.

We had been told that a tour would be finished after we had done thirty bombing trips, but were now told that we had to reach a certain number of points, three points for a French trip and four for a German trip This meant that we would be doing thirty-five Trips in order to complete a tour. The "nickle" over Paris was not counted, neither was the trip that was abandoned en route, even though we had been shot at.

24th Mission 3.9.44 Venlo,
4hrs. Daylight.

All of the planes were loaded well beyond their safety limits and taking off was not an easy matter especially as the Halifax tended to swing and Bill had to allow for this by using the throttles.

Venlo is on the Mass River between Kleve and Julich. The 9th U.S. Army were attacking the southern end of the Siegfried Line while the 2nd British Army attacked the northern end in their drive towards the Rhine. Our job was to soften up the entrenched German positions. They had moved their anti-aircraft guns as they retreated and so the concentration of flak was much greater over this target. We flew in formation as number two behind the Wing Commander. We had icing on the windscreen for quite some time and this made it difficult to see. We bombed right on the runway even though the bombsight was unserviceable.

We knew we could minimize the risk of being hit by staying in the centre of the stream, slightly above the level we were asked to fly at, and increasing our speed after dropping our bombs by losing a little of the altitude we had in reserve. This precaution paid off and once again we made a safe return to our base. Three Halifaxes and their crews were lost. Venlo was one of six airfields in South Holland. The weather really clamped down and we were diverted to an American drome. "A" for Able, flown by Jack Ross, was in trouble. I was able communicate with him by using an Aldis lamp to send messages in Morse code. He followed us and landed without any trouble. The Americans were very hospitable. Flt Lt. Rose had his throttle shot off but was able to come back. How he was able to do this I will never know. I heard today about "Hatter's Castle" the hospital where R.A.F psychiatric patients were sent. It was an old Victorian mansion with extensive grounds in Derbyshire. Poor blokes who let themselves think too much about what they were doing. I wonder how many of them would cope after the war. I applied for a commission with all of the rest of the crew but I was the only one to miss out. Wing Commander Wilson was most interested in the fact that I went to a 'government' school. He had some trouble believing that I did. All of the rest of the crew had gone to Catholic Colleges except for Bas. He had been to a C of E College as his father worked in New Guinea and his mother had passed on. The Winco was amazed that I had even got into aircrew. Apparently, anyone who lays claim to be a gentleman must have been to a private grammar school. In Australia very few of us went to private schools except Catholics.

That night I was cycling back from the sergeant's mess, along a road that led to our sleeping quarters. It was lined with tall trees and, with no lights; I had to navigate by the stars. Since completing the astronavigation course in West Freugh I have taken a keen interest in the constellations and often tried to recognise as many as I could. Most of the

time spent on the ground it is pretty cloudy but we were mostly above the clouds when flying. It is a pity that when I got home to Australia the stars in the southern sky, being so different, were not familiar.

The "blackout" was rigorously enforced although it is remarkable how you got used to wandering around in the dark. Where I would normally use a torch, I used my newly acquired night vision. They fed us a lot of carrots to help.

25th Mission 10.9.44 La Havre (NW of Paris),
4hrs 15mins. Daylight

On this trip, 992 Bombers dropped 5,000 tons of bombs. We were bombing very close to our own troops so we had to be very accurate. Don was spot on. We took a photograph about twenty seconds after Don dropped the bombs so that the bombing leader could see how accurate we were. We had to fly straight and level for this and it was the most dangerous part of the trip. Not every crew were so conscientious as one could tell from the photographs. I counted out the seconds with bated breath and was so relieved when Bill turned to port and dived to increase the speed. I asked Bill why he always turned to port and he said, "We all do it to stop colliding with other aircraft." The time and height were displayed on the photo. When we had finished bombing the aircraft was so much lighter and much more easily handled, but if there was a headwind, and there usually was. Then it would take longer to return to our base than it had been to fly to the target.

To see the target below was an extraordinary experience as the searchlights and bomb blasts and fires made it look like day. The coloured markers that the Pathfinders used to mark the target were a spectacle in themselves. The number of searchlights was amazing; they looked like a forest of lights. In order to avoid bomb creep back, Pathfinder planes sent down more markers so that bomb aimers would not bomb short. This added to the spectacle, which was developing all around us. There was a tendency for them to drop their bombs and get away from the thick flak.

Ammunition exploded like a fireworks display. Don and Sandy also saw this and were quite impressed with such a spectacular show.

On several occasions, the German fighters waited until we had finished bombing and followed us back to our dromes and fired on us as we were landing. Having our flaps down meant there was little chance to manoeuvre. The rear and mid upper gunners were normally in their braced landing positions inside the aircraft. When Bill became aware that fighters were around he asked them to stay put until we landed.

Going back to our Nissan huts after we had returned from a raid we were able to sleep in, but others who shared our hut often disturbed us. They would come in drunk or brought their bikes in and trip over them. As time went on the discipline improved as we all came to realise that we deserved a bit of peace and quiet.

26th Mission 12.9.44 Munster,
4hrs 4mins. Daylight

Flying in formation, we were the leading aircraft. Some of the planes disobeyed orders and flew over us and dropped their incendiary bombs on top of us. It was fortunate we did not catch on fire although it made the aircraft difficult to manage.

The target was a railway yard and we were leading the squadron. We were only a small force with the task of disrupting the flow of supplies and reserve forces going to the German front. We assembled over the Wash, north of London at 20,000 feet above the clouds in bright sunshine. This was to be the first raid on Munster since June 1943. A "sea of fire" was observed in the lower part of the town, which could not be entered for several hours. High explosive bombs destroyed water mains and their firemen were helpless. An aircraft flying next to us caught fire. We were flying "L" for Love and sustained a lot of damage.

Two incendiary bombs had gone right through the fuselage; one midway between the two turrets and the other about two feet from Sandy in the rear turret. John Allen, our engineer, put out the fires. An English sergeant had been awarded the Victorian Cross for doing the same thing. Two Halifaxes were lost. P/O Groves and his rear gunner were killed and the rest of the crew were made POWs. We made it back but the damage was almost enough to have been scrapped, however they eventually decided to repair it.

The other services had awarded Victoria Crosses to their men for bravery so the heads of the RAF decided to award one too, so the went through the current records to find a suitable recipient and came across a sergeant who had put out a fire with his parachute and had some slight burns on his hands. The award went to his head as he would stop officers in the street and demand that they salute him. So after that medals to other ranks were seldom awarded.

When we went to London on leave we would go to Australia House and the Codgers club where many Australians would congregate and see them waving their hands about relating stories about their near misses and how they escaped, so we heard of many stories about escapees from Germany and how some of them had dodged fighters and escaped from being coned. There was so many that you could write a book about them.

I joined a number of clubs in London, the Overseas League, where I could stay for much less than I would have to pay at a hotel. It was quite central and I met some very interesting people there, including a Brigadier who I breakfasted with. He wanted to know why I was not an officer. Another was the Queens Club that had a wonderful ice skating rink that was so much better than the public rinks. The skates they lent were much better too.

Back on the squadron we were told about Captain Thompson, who was a South African and wore an Army uniform, was lost out at sea off Bridlington. He was a very tall good-looking young man and quite athletic. We searched for 5¼ hours but saw only an oil slick on the top of the water. I was sad for days as I pondered the reason for this loss. Bill, who had been a friend of his, was especially cut up about it as he was acting flight Commander and had ordered him to do the exercise.

Harry, Bas, Don, Charley, Sandy.
On the Yorkshire Moors

The Army in Belgium was short of petrol. (This was before we had placed a pipeline under the Channel). We had so many Jerry cans of petrol stacked all around us after we had taken up our positions that we could not move anywhere. It was not a good feeling knowing that, if we were hit, there was no way that we could bale out. It used almost as much petrol on the return trip to Belgium as we were able to deliver to them. Altogether our squadron took over half a million gallons of petrol. When we landed in Brussels, the ground staff had to come and unload the cans before we could get out of the aircraft. We had to walk between some tapes on the ground, as the area between them was free of mines. There were many bomb craters all over the place. This was the first time we had seen the results of our bombing. The Germans had camouflaged their buildings on the airstrip by placing three-ply painted cutouts of farm buildings on top of their hangers so that from a distance it was hard to see that it was an airdrome. The whole place looked like a film studio lot. There were a large number of disabled German aircraft there including Ju88s & E109s etc. It was the first time I saw saw these these aircraft at close quarters. While we were there, we went for a walk and came across a stall at the side of the road. Using English money we bought some grapes, or "raisons". My school French was just enough to make the transaction. We gave some chocolates to the children that seemed to come out of nowhere and they followed us, singing out "Viva la R.A.F". They were all quite excited that they had been liberated from the Germans. When we arrived back, the W.A.F. girls descended on my bag of grapes and by the time I reached my hut there was only one bunch left.

We went to Brussels four times over five days; not my happiest experience, especially as we were not awarded any points for these trips. I was happy when a pipeline was laid down so we were not asked to do it anymore. What a relief!

In the mess one night, an elderly Warrant Officer who worked in the armoury section, told us a story of a nineteen year old, Albert Ball, who served in the Royal Flying Corps during World War One. He came from a well-to-do family in Nottingham and was extremely religious. His squadron was based in France and he flew a little single seater Nieuport. The average life of a pilot on his squadron was three weeks. He had worked out a most dangerous tactic: when an enemy plane was behind him, Ball would wait until the last moment; when the enemy was about to fire. Then he would turn sharply and come up under his opponent and shoot him down. He practiced his manoeuvres constantly. He engaged two enemy Albatrosses but ran out of ammunition, so he followed them back to their aerodrome and dropped a note challenging them to a duel next day at dawn. They took up the challenge but turned up with three additional planes. They kept cutting off his line of retreat and forcing further and further into Germany. He again ran out of ammunition, went into a spin and landed awkwardly in a field. Two German planes followed him down and landed on either side of him and started to walk towards him. He opened his throttle and took off. His "crash landing" had been a pretence.

Twentieth of September 1944. We found out today that Guy Gibson V.C.of Dam Buster fame had crashed in Holland after leading a large operation as Master Bomber on Monchengladbach. He was flying a Mosquito. Bill said that he was another pilot who was nearly not able to be a pilot as he was so short.

27th Mission 7.10.44 Kleve (near Arnham),
4hrs 55mins. Daylight

About 351 aircraft took part in this raid. There were some other raids going on that we could see them from a distance. We were caught in some slipstreams often and this made it a bumpy ride. The second British Army were bogged down just south of Holland, near Eindhoven. We were to bomb Kleve, which was being used by the Germans as a supply depot and as their headquarters. The centre and northeastern parts of the town were devastated. The Germans had mined ahead of the advancing Allies and, despite the heavy bombing, they fought well and by the end of October they had lost only a dozen villages and withdrawn about eight miles. It was not until February the following year that Kleve was taken; when a thousand guns were assembled and a five-hour barrage took place with fury unprecedented on the western front. At the same time, Bomber Command dropped high explosives on the town. It was reduced to rubble, but a massive amount of explosives was needed to accomplish this victory. Two Halifaxes were lost.

When we arrived back at Pocklington there were so many planes milling around in the fog that we were diverted. We decided to land at an American Flying Fortress base. We had been hit several times in one engine and, as we circled, we lost power and landed in one of the fields between the runways. We had trouble stopping but eventually pulled up a few feet from the control tower. We could see the American controllers watching our propellers revolving right before their eyes! On each trip we were given enough fuel to reach the target, depending on the amount of bombs that we carried, plus a margin to account for headwinds and fog. The storage tanks had a self-sealing rubber solution lining so that if we were hit there we did not lose any. On this occasion the amount was not enough as the tanks were completely dry by the time we stopped.

We treated ourselves to bacon and eggs at the PX store. What abundance! Then we had a hearty meal in the Officers Mess. Just as we were finished and feeling completely stuffed there was a message from the C.O. saying, “He knew how much the Australians liked steak, so he has asked the cooks to grill up a large T-bone steak for each of us with all the trimmings”. We could hardly be impolite and say, “we are full already”, but we should have. The steaks were so large they would have fed a whole English family for a week. That night we were sleeping in a hanger in fold up beds. We were stuffed full and couldn’t sleep Most of us could not keep all of this food down.

As we were taking off from this station next morning Bill decided to show off by getting airborne on as short a run as he could manage. (The yanks took such a long run before they took off.) Bill applied the brakes at the start of the runway, accelerated the engines to maximum revolutions, released the brakes and off we went on the shortest take off ever.

When I was in Canada I was put into a decomposition chamber and sent up to 20,000 feet so that I could feel the affect of the lack of oxygen. I felt quite all right and was told to write down several passages that were dictated to me, when I put on the oxygen mask and checked what I had written I was surprised to see a lot of scribble. On one occasion, while on operations, I experienced the same symptoms and hastily replaced my mask before I suffered from oxygen deprivation.

We bought an old Morris Oxford car, very rusty and in poor condition, we all put in ten pounds each. We found another car of the same vintage in the fowl yard of a nearby farm, took it to pieces, and gave it all to the fitters and riggers who worked on our aircraft. They put the best parts together and, miracle of miracles, it worked. The cars were different colours but we did not try to respray the parts that were different. I learnt to drive on the aerodrome where I had plenty of space to drive in. I could also look at the gear stick at the same time.

We visited the surrounding farms so that we could buy eggs. We had done this on our bicycles previously. The crew had a forty-eight hours pass so we drove to the nearby coastal town of Bridlington, and stayed in a three-storied boarding house, run by a man and his wife and their two teenage daughters. A local restaurant down at the harbour gave us steak and eggs for dinner as we were the first entire Air Force crew that they had staying there - a real treat. The standard menu at cafes around England during the war was:

- Scrambled Egg on Toast (Powdered eggs)
- Sausages and Mash
- Welsh Rarebit
- Beans on Toast
- Fish and chips
- Ersatz coffee or tea

The mug in which my tea came had printed on its side, “Manly Hotel”. I was amazed as this was my hometown back in Australia. I turned it upside down when I had drunk my tea and, sure enough, it had “Deaton’s Hotel Manly” printed underneath. Deaton was the publican’s name. The restaurant proprietor told us that he had bought it in a job lot from a local potter.

We hired a rowing boat manned by an old salt. He took us out of the old stone harbour to where we could see the stone fishermen’s cottages along the front. There was a three-foot swell running but I asked if I could row. “I don’t know about thaaart”, he said. Reluctantly he allowed me to take the oars. It was a bit tricky when the boat was side on to the waves, as I had to put one oar in the water higher than the other. We were able to row back to the stone walled harbour and it was interesting to see the terrace houses along the waterfront where the local fishermen lived.

On the way back to Pocklington, we had trouble with the car’s petrol pump. I solved our problem by offering to pump the petrol manually. I lay on the mudguard and pumped it by hand. The trick was to pump at the right speed so as not to flood or starve the carburettor. It was pretty cold with a wind chill factor that was increased the faster that we went. I was nearly frozen stiff. We made it back to Pocklington eventually. I am sure that the ground staff had more trouble with the car than they did with “N” for Nan.

On our next 48-hour pass we went into York and tied the car up to a lamppost as if we were tying up a cart and horse in the Australian outback. We spent some time in Betty’s Bar and when we came out a policeman came up to us and said, “Just as well I happened to

pass. Some fool has tied your car to this post. You could have driven off and pulled the post over". It was only a little rope.

All cars had blackout masks fitted over their headlights with only very narrow strips of light showing through. It was only just possible to see oncoming traffic, so driving at night was a health hazard. When we finished our second tour Bill sold the car to the R.C. Padre. More correctly, he was given the car because he never paid Bill for it. He was an Australian priest so Bill was not willing to make a fuss about it. So there went a weeks pay. But we had a lot of fun with the car so I suppose it was worth it.

When I travelled to London I would look out for someone to chat to during the trip. On one occasion I saw a young Leading Aircraftswoman with dark hair struggling with a heavy suitcase. She was grateful when I offered to carry it for her and we took seats together. She was stationed at Lissett and was going home to London on leave to see her parents. We talked for several hours as the countryside flashed by. She loved poetry and could quote from Browning and Keats. I had always been interested in poetry; my father in his younger days had been too and had a good collection of poetry books. I took a book of poems with me to the war. It was the only book that I took. She was very well read and I was able to hold my own as I was able to take home books from the bookshop providing that they were wrapped in brown paper so we could tell customers about them.

We were interested in similar things and I enjoyed her company. It was amazing how many poems that we both knew. I have seldom felt so close to anyone before. It was more of an intellectual closeness than that I had previously experienced. We exchanged addresses but we did not contact one another again. The film "A Brief Encounter", I saw years later reminded me of this girl.

When I was on leave in London I met several Coastal Command types at Codgers Club off Fleet Street. They were talking about a submarine that they sank in the North Sea. They dropped a mine right on the bow and it sank quite quickly. The stern went down first while the bow stuck straight up in the air like a whale breaching. About a dozen of the crew managed to get out and after the submarine had sunk they formed a circle and held hands. The plane circled them for twenty minutes taking photos, the sailors would not last more than twenty minutes in such freezing water, half an hour at the most. I thought what a sad way to die. If we were hit with a full bomb load we would be blown into a thousand bits in half a second like poor old Donald's crew. It was a miracle that was saved.

Bill, Don and Sandy were Roman Catholic and when we were on leave in London, Bas (who was Church of England), and I (Methodist) would go to Mass on Sunday mornings. I was most impressed with the architecture of some of the London churches and went into quite a few when I could. I particularly remember All-Hallows, which was later, bombed Also St. Ethelburg at Bishopsgate with its Gothic Arches and the light flooding in through the leadlight windows and its beautifully carved pulpit. St Magnus the Martyr at London Bridge had the light coming in shining brightly onto the white vaulted ceiling, and above the alter, a beautiful eagle with outstretched wings and Jesus on the Cross with the two Marys at his feet.

Bill

All Souls at Langham Place with its twelve Corinthian columns, circular base and tall spire. We visited Westminster Abbey and saw the carvings of the famous laid out on slabs. At St. Paul's we climbed the stone staircase to the dome and tested the whispering gallery. We were very surprised to find how far a whisper could carry. Bas whispered on one side of the dome and I clearly heard him on the other.

One day I was standing on the platform at Victoria Station waiting for a train. Two huge guardsmen resplendent in their best uniforms nudged one another and pointed to the coat of arms embroidered on my sleeve designating my rank as a Warrant Officer. "Gorblimey, he's a Regimental Sergeant Major", one said. This was the equivalent army rank, which was earned through many years and was usually awarded to men of large and imposing stature. I was only twenty-two at the time and felt rather young.

On being made a Warrant Officer my pay was increased to 27 shillings and 6 pence per day, equal to a Pilot Officer's. It was more than most tradesmen earned. I was able to increase the amount of money that I sent home to my mother.

Gremlins

Gremlins were strange little creatures,
We blamed them for all that went wrong.
They displayed some funny features,
I just don't know where they belong.

Sometimes they're in my radio,
Sandy says" They're in my guns"
While Don tells them where to go.
Bill says" He's seen some naughty ones."

I really don't know what to do;
Its a problem we have to share.
John has them in his engines too,
They seem to be just everywhere.

This is the story of a navigator from our squadron who was made a prisoner of war.

Pilot Officer F.G. Smith had just bombed Hamburg when the Identification Friend Or Foe started bleeping and the skipper called for everyone to bail out as they were on fire.

"I had been cloistered in the navigator's position and had not seen the flames. I ate the secret codes, which were written on rice paper and grabbed my parachute but only attached one clip. The plane went into a steep dive, which pinned me to the floor. After some seconds the aircraft pulled out of the dive and went into a spin. I fell to the side, to the roof, to the side again and again. My clothes came in contact with the burning curtains and caught on fire as well. Every time we spun I saw the quick release handle and tried desperately to grab it several times. Then I started to pray. Suddenly there was a flash and I found myself floating through the air; my shoes and socks had been blown off. Having twisted the quick release clasp on the harness many times, I started to do that when I realized that I was about to fall out of the parachute and I slowly twisted it back. Then I pulled the "D" ring and the chute released but did not fully open as it was only a small ball. I ripped away at the cover removing my fingernails in the process. Suddenly the 'chute tore past my face. I gave a one huge sigh of relief and suddenly I landed heavily in a cornfield. Then I said the Lords Prayer and looked down at my damaged leg. I started walking in bare feet not knowing that I had three muscles severed in my right leg below the right knee, the cartilages were torn and sticking out, all the ribs on my left side were broken and cutting my lung, my stomach torn away from my pelvis, my kidney had burst, my ankles damaged and swollen. So I decided to walk to Spain. Off I went, when around the corner came a German soldier. I was taken to a hospital where I spent several months and could not have better treatment and the nurses were as caring as though I was one of them. When I was sent to a prison of war camp it was a rude awakening."

*Pilot Officer F.G.Smith.

When I started on operations I wondered how I would react to the circumstances that I was about to meet. Now I know that I can overcome my fears and concentrate on the job. It was a great relief. Some of the airmen were quite advance in their training before they found some medical excuse not to go on. There were more of these than those who actually went L.M.F.(Lack of moral fibre).

Mission Concluded

Into the dark night we sped,
Following those who were dead,
Driving to the hell ahead,
By strange forces we are led.

Fearful since we left the ground,
Fear that made our hearts to pound,
To the target we were bound,
Listening to the engines sound.

The target lit up like day,
Try to dodge the searchlights ray,
Large red fires beneath us lay,
And never must we give away.

Drop our bombs and stay on track,
We have never seen such flak,
After this we can turn back,
Knowing now we will not crack.

Taxi to our holding bay,
We will live another day,
Now returning from the fray,
Feel the tension drain away.

It cost £42, 000 to build a Halifax. Crew training £10,000 for each of the crew except for the gunners. £13,000 for bombs servicing and ground staff training. Each bomber represented £120,000 in value. The average wage was £ 5 per week.

Our crew, along with many others, were sent on a practice attack course. We were to storm another squadron armed with chalk and we were to draw swastikas on any place that we claimed to have blown up. We were issued with brown overalls so we could crawl along in the dirt without getting our uniforms dirty. The Home Guard, the R.A.F. Battalion and other airmen were defending the squadron from attack. It was night and we slowly advanced on them, crawling on our stomachs, and pulling ourselves along with our elbows. I found a furrow and made good headway using its 4 to 5 inches depth to hide me. I came across a sentry just as an officer approached him. He challenged the officer, "Who goes there?" The officer gave the password, "Blackbird". They chatted away for a while and the officer went off. I stood up and the sentry challenged me. "Blackbird", I said, and made for the main building, wielding my piece of chalk. I was able to cover most of the important targets in this way. There were a few fights between the defenders and the invaders, which looked very realistic to me; I saw some fists flying in the darkness.

We were also sent on an escape course in a remote area of the Yorkshire moors. We were sent there in an enclosed truck and let off in pairs and told to find our way back to the squadron and use any method we could to make it back without being captured by the Home Guard and Boy Scouts who were out looking for us. We joined up with the other members of the crew as we had previously arranged, and walked until we found a farmhouse. It was bitterly cold so when we found a haystack where the pigs were sleeping and had made a warm spot here and there we shoved them out and settled down to sleep. But the pigs objected strongly and so we had to move on. Bas discovered a large shed full of draft horses, and we squatted in a narrow space behind them where it was comparatively warm. But they would urinate with a great flow and kick up their heels so we had to leave. We walked all night until we came to a small village where a Regimental Sergeant Major passed us. He was a very large man and had a magnificent handlebar moustache. We were dishevelled by this time and were wearing overalls but he saluted Bill in parade ground style. Bill's response was quite feeble in comparison. We took a bus back to Pocklington. Some other "escapees" had stolen a doctor's car to drive back. The organizers did not quite know how to deal with this as the doctor had left his keys in the ignition.

Talking to the local people was not easy for us. Firstly, we found it hard to understand their accent; secondly we seemed to have little in common. We must have seemed very foreign to them indeed, as they considered anyone who lived twenty miles away to be foreigners. These were people who worked for the local farmers that we met in little country pubs. We did not have the same trouble understanding the many accents that we heard from other airmen who came from all parts of Britain and colonies.

28th Mission 9.10.44 Bockum,
5hrs 50 mins. Night.

At the briefing the meteorological officer told us about the dangers of the strata cumulus cloud that we would meet, and the briefing officer acted as though Santa Claus was handing out presents.

"Well chaps we've laid on a good trip tonight. You can expect a fair amount of opposition about here", pointing to a patch of red on the map where an estimated 140 anti-aircraft guns

were located. “I don’t think you need worry much about the fighters until you’re about eighty miles from the target. There are several squadrons of Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulf 190’s in the area-just keep an eye out for them. You know the difference, don’t you? One has two engines and the other only one, right?” The heavy sarcasm did not go unnoticed. “You head south to Folkstone, then across the Channel to just south of Boulogne then due west to Charleroi, then north west to Aachen-Gladbach at 175 mph., then slow down for the bomb run and bomb at 19,000 ft. Then turn north and dive to 8,000 ft. and gain speed to 220 mph on this leg. Then due east until the French coast and north-west back to base”. Bockum had the largest oil refinery in the world.

A total of 435 aircraft took part in this raid. Eventually it was our turn to take off. It was dark but we had our own little world lit with small guarded lights. I had an argument with Bill about my light. It had a cowling over the globe so that you could not see it from the outside however Bill told me to draw my curtains. I explained that you could not see a ray of light unless it was reflecting on something. Bill said, “You can see a searchlight can’t you? So I had to switch off my light whenever I wanted to look out. I was supposed to watch the “Fishpond” to see if any enemy fighters were on our tail. There was not much to see at night anyway except for the time we were over the target. The navigator could not see out at all. His table was pretty well lit. I had to listen to base every half hour in case of a recall; there was only one occasion that happened. Some of the aircraft were detailed to send back wind speed and direction; the experienced navigators were selected to do this. The base then averages them and sends them back so that less experienced navigators can check their calculations. I would send this message back in Morse code and receive the reply as well. Bas made sure that we were in the middle of the stream as fighters picked out the planes that were trailing behind or were off course.

We had an “Elsin” which was a toilet back in the rear of the plane that was designed so that its contents did not tip out when the plane turned or dived. We did not use it much except as a urinal. You had to be careful that you did not stick to the seat if you wanted to use it for anything else.

Suddenly we were blinded by a searchlight, then another, and a third. We were coned. This called for quick thinking as we had only a few seconds before we could expect a shell to explode in our bomb bay. Very few aircraft escaped once that they were coned. The German gunners could ascertain your height, direction and speed and place their flack exactly where you would be when the shells arrived. Bill threw the plane into a steep dive and changed direction at the same time. The intensity of the light inside the aircraft was intense, shutting my eyes was no help for instead of a blinding white light there was a blinding red light, as though I was looking directly into the sun. We accelerated quickly. We were able to lose all but one of the searchlights but were affected by the extreme “G” forces and could hardly move. Don was sitting in the co-pilots seat and was able to help Bill to pull the plane out of the horrific dive by putting his feet on the dashboard and pulling with all his might. Their combined efforts enabled them to pull the plane out of the dive and the remaining searchlight lost us. Bill said, “I am just a frustrated fighter pilot at heart” My heart was thumping while my mind was calculating the odds of getting out of that near death dive. I thought this is what it is like to die. It is not much different to being on the Big Dipper at Lunar Park. We did not need to be shot down by anti air guns. We could destroy

ourselves trying to escape being coned. The problem of taking evasive action like this was that there is a great danger of hitting another of our own aircraft but this was a minor in comparison to being coned.

The Ruhr was one of the best-defended targets in Germany. We had to fly over Essen, Venlo, Sterkrad, Cologne and several other large industrial cities to get there. The whole area was filled with searchlights and anti-aircraft guns.

We lost six aircraft from our squadron. There were forty-two airmen that were probably killed, although one in seven on average would have become prisoners of war. I did not hear of any POW's dying while in custody except while they were trying to escape. We could see that a large section south of the town had been destroyed. On our return to base we had a near miss when we were landing, as the outer circuit lights for another squadron were quite close to ours. There was a tendency to relax once we were out of enemy territory and over the Channel however Bill constantly reminded us to be extra vigilant because German fighters often followed us home and waited until we had our flaps down ready for landing before attacking us. Also as in this case other planes concentrating on their landing drill would not notice another aircraft on either the same circuit or that of a nearby drome as the outer circuits were sometimes very close together.

Between operations we still practiced bombing raids over England and engaged in mock fighter affiliation. During some of these trips Bill would occasionally allow others in the crew to take turns flying the plane from the co-pilot's position. When I had the aircraft on course, Bill would say, "Your left wing is too low". When I had corrected that he would say, "You're climbing". I would correct this and find that the airspeed was not right and I would be off course again. It was a constant battle to keep all of these activities co-ordinated. Over correction was the biggest trap. Bill advised us to make small corrections, but to make them constantly. I gradually improved and it was a great help when I was learning to drive the crew's car on the runway, where there was plenty of room to practice without anything to get in the way. I was able to look down at the gearstick to see what gear I was in and I also learned how to double shuffle as cars in those days did not have synchromesh gears

We received a large parcel of knitted clothing from Australia. Some of the jumpers and socks were beautifully done while some others were obviously knitted by young people without much experience. I received a beautiful jumper just the right shade of blue that fitted perfectly. Some of the others wanted it but it was too small for them. Some of the socks were knitted with such thick wool and very large needles that they left a pattern on my feet when I wore them. The scarves were good too although some were either too long or too short. I managed to get one that was just right and that kept my neck warm from then on. Most of the pilots wore silk scarves for some reason.

When I became the most senior N.C.O. in the hut I inherited the only single room. This had its own pot-bellied stove in it. If I filled the stove before I went to bed it would last until morning when I filled it again, so it seldom went out. At about midnight or a little later it would become very hot and the chimney would glow red, half way up to the ceiling. I would also crunch up pieces of paper and put them between the blankets as extra insulation. With snow on the ground outside, the steel huts were like refrigerators.

29th Mission 13.10.44 Duisberg,
5hrs 10mins. Daylight

Over 1,000 bombers took part on this raid and a greater weight of bombs was dropped than any previous raid on a German industrial city - 9,000 tons. Huge fires were started in the dock area of the river port, and the whole city seemed to be on fire. Two jet fighters attacked some of the bombers but most of the damage was caused by flak. This was boxed flak that left the sky dense with black and blue explosions. This subsided considerably as the raid progressed, although we experienced a large amount of flak leaving the target area. Fifteen aircraft were lost. The next night another 1, 000-bomber raid was made on the same target. Squadron Leader Ward was badly shot up but managed to return to base O.K. On the way back we passed through some huge towering storm clouds that caused the aircraft to drop suddenly leaving my stomach behind and then we experienced a bumpy ride for a while as though we were in a little motorboat in a rough sea. It was a frightening experience flying through a storm with lightning flashing and loud thunder that hurt my ears, so that I could not hear the Morse on the radio. A glaring white light that was quite eerie would illuminate the interior of the aircraft. I don't know if this was because we were flying through cloud or if it was caused by static electricity. The stress caused by the bumpy landing that Bill made was quite mild in comparison to the terrible storm we had flown through.

30th Mission 15.10.44 Wilhelmshaven,
4hrs 10mins. Night

Wilhelmshaven is situated just south of Denmark at the north of the Weser River. It is a naval base with a fine harbour. It was very easy to find. Heavy damage was inflicted throughout the bombing area. And fires spread quickly through the built up area. 2,136 tons of bombs were dropped. There were 506 planes sent on this raid and only one plane was lost from our squadron. We were caught in the slipstream of another aircraft, which shook us up a bit; it was a strange sensation and took us by surprise. Near misses and collisions happened occasionally. Sometimes when flying quite high some aircraft had birds flying into their engines and caused them to stop working. I was happy to return to earth in one piece and get warm again as it was quite cold at night sometimes. I was amazed at the debriefing to hear some of the other crews talking in a joking manner about dicing with death.

22.10.44

We flew a new aircraft on a test flight today. We flew down to Somerset and over "Currypool", (the farm where Sandy and I often spent our leave) and dropped a note by a parachute I made from a handkerchief. We dived down at low level several times, then we flew to the place where Don and Bill spent leave with the Jones family and did the same stunt. We could see quite clearly the family run out of the house and even from the height we flew you could see the excitement on their faces.

This was a real sightseeing trip as the visibility was excellent, and we flew at such a low level. It was interesting to view from the air farms and villages that we had seen when we were on leave. It gave us a new perspective. The fields showed a remarkable difference in colour depending on the type of crop that had been sown. I was surprised at the number of

small villages that we could see in Somerset and the surrounding counties. I had walked or rode over much of the Quantock area so I knew it well. The small rivers that wended their way seawards were numerous as well. No wonder the farms there are so fertile and manage to harvest more than one crop each year.

31st Mission 25.10.44 Essen,
5hrs 30mins. Daylight

When the target was revealed at briefing there was an audible sigh to be heard. Not the dreaded Ruhr again? The map showed large areas of red denoting large flak positions. Essen was the home of the Krups and other heavy industrial factories. Over 1,000 aircraft took part. It was a filthy fog this morning but we took off. There was great danger of collision after we had taken off as there was so many aircraft flying around in the fog. The gunners were keeping a sharp lookout as usual so that they could warn Bill if anyone got too close. I could see on the "Fishpond" if there were any below us, but not if the were at the same height or above. The target was covered in heavy cloud but the Pathfinders accurately laid flares. A strong glow could be seen through the cloud.. Eight of our planes were lost and several others were badly damaged but managed to get back. We heard a message from the Master Bomber, "Take over Number Two, I have been hit and I am going down". He said it so calmly that I found it hard to believe that he was actually diving to his death. I was jolly glad to have finished this trip after thinking about the Master Bomber. We had to stop that thinking feeling.

Going down to Somerset again on leave, I arrived at Bath at 11.30pm and was unable to get accommodation, so I called into the Fire Station where the firemen were kind enough to give me a bed for the night. The next day I strolled down Milsom Street and I climbed the hill to Lamsdown Crescent. From the Bath Spa station the whole city is spread out on a hill. Most of the buildings were of a light honey-coloured stone, which reflects the sun and gives off a warm glow. Not far from the station are the famous hot sulphur springs, but they were not in very good repair when I saw them. I went to the Roman Museum and the Bath Abbey, a delicate Gothic style building with many windows. The Circus is a continuous circle of fashionable homes where Gainsborough once lived. The Royal Crescent reminds one of elegant 18th century ladies parading in the afternoons.

I travelled on to "Currypool" where the Jeans family gave me their usual warm welcome. Frank took me to the cattle market at Taunton to see some cattle auctioned. He explained some of the finer points of cattle judging. He also explained that although all of the farmers were wearing riding trousers there were slight differences that separated the well bred from the rest. They were too subtle for me to see the difference.

Ann and I went horse riding in the Quantock and Pollock hills. This was a wonderful way to see the countryside as we could see over the hedges as we rode down the lanes. Ann pointed out one farm, which was owned by an Australian who had married an English girl after the First World War and had settled down to farm the way his grandfather had done. Ann had packed a picnic basket so we had lunch beside a small stream under a weeping willow tree. The grass was quite long so we were quite comfortable.

We also went on another day to Ilfracombe where there was a good harbour for shipping, except when the tide was out or when there was a stiff northerly wind. We waded out for a

long time before we were able to swim. There was no sand to tread on but squelchy mud. The town had a lifeboat, which was hauled by tractor along a carriageway through the narrow streets while other traffic was brought to a halt. It was a rather slow process as it took some time to assemble the crew when the alarm was sounded, and they looked slightly ridiculous seated in a lifeboat while being hauled through the town.

Back at work in the fields we were very pleased to quench our thirsts from a small wooden barrel, called a firkin, which held about half a gallon of cider. This was placed in the ditch at the side of the field to keep it cool and when we felt too hot we could go and have a drink. I thought that this was a wonderful idea. I often felt too hot.

Back at the squadron after this excellent leave, we heard the news of F/O John Holmes. He had flown with Squadron Leader Jarand to Cologne as a bomb aimer. Over the target and when he was about to press the release button he was hit by some incendiaries dropped from an aircraft flying above. Two hours later, he opened his eyes to find himself in the rest bed in the middle of the aircraft and was about to land at Pocklington. This was a frequent occurrence Many crews, including ours had bombs falling on them from above. Luckily for us ours was “only” a small incendiary and Bill was able to take it with him to debriefing and wave it about asking which of you people dropped this bomb on us? Crews were often bombed from our own lads flying above.

32nd Mission 4.11.44 Bochum,
4hrs 35mins. Night

We were getting to the end of our tour now and we expected that the trips would become easier but we seemed to be losing as many planes as ever. Bill told us not to lose our concentration especially as we were so close to the end.

The target was a steelworks, some small engineering factories and railway yards in the Ruhr area. It was quite successful although it was very heavily defended. The master bomber had the unenviable task of directing the raid at a low level. This target, had the largest number of searchlights that we had come across and we were coned twice but they could not have predicted our position correctly as they moved away from us. There was so many aircraft for the searchlight spotters to choose from why did the have to pick on us?. There was a seventy-mile an hour ground wind that blew the smoke away making everything quite clear. The target was most colourful as the red and green target indicators surrounded by the incendiaries and orange flashes from the bombs exploding made it pretty to watch.

Over the target area a great shower of window aluminium strips was dropped by us to simulate a plane so that there appeared to the German screens as though we were much more numerous than we were. A searchlight caught this in its beam and made them sparkle with thousands of tiny lights falling all around. This was better than any fireworks display I had ever seen. We used 400 tons of “Window” every month that is 1000 million strips measuring 30 centimetres by 1.5. The strips were packed in bundles 2200 held together by an elastic band and they weighed two pounds. It was my job to throw it out of a special chute. A jet-propelled fighter had a shot at us, but we were able to avoid any damage by some furious corkscrewing. The G-forces during this manoeuvre were immense. F/O Cameron failed to return.

We dropped 3,332 tons of bombs, destroying or severely damaging nearly a thousand buildings. Over one thousand Germans were killed. We lost 25 aircraft. The damage to the steel works was extensive. We passed Düsseldorf and Cologne on the way back where the defences were very strong. It was such a relaxing feeling flying over the Channel and reaching dear old England again.

33rd Mission 12.11.44 Kattegat,
5hrs 25mins. Night

This was a gardening trip. Three bombers were selected to lay mines near the Kiel Canal, while the main stream was bombing a nearby city. We had to fly through some very bad weather again with hail, sleet and snow. We also experienced a bad electrical storm. We could see the main stream in the far distance.

We felt vulnerable as we flew along as we usually had quite a number of planes around to protect us. We were always right in the centre of the stream. We later heard through the underground and from aerial photographs that we had destroyed a number of barges that carried large quantities of oil, which had caught alight creating a fire that ran along the canal for miles and did a lot of damage. This was not as frightening as dropping mines in fiords, which had steep sides and not much leeway between them.

On the same day The Tirpitz was bombed for the third time, in Norway. This time 30 planes carrying Tallboys bombed it and several of the bombs sank it. This bomb was 21 feet long 38 inches in diameter and weighed 12,000 pounds. All of the planes returned to Scotland safely even though it was a 2,250-mile trip. Over 1,000 sailers were killed.

34th Mission 16.11.44 Julich near Cologne,
4hrs 30mins. Daylight

Over 1,000 Lancasters and Halifaxes took part in this raid, which was timed for a few hours before the British Army was set to advance. Nearly 2,000 tons of bombs were dropped. Huge pillars of smoke rising to about 7,000 feet could be seen after we had bombed. The road bridge across the Ruhr River was destroyed. Further attacks had been planned for Julich but this one was so successful they were not necessary. General Bradley had four divisions of the 7tth American Corps moving forward while the smoke was still rising and the Germans stunned. This was one of the largest attacks made by Bomber Command.

Bill was telling us about a friend of his who was a second tour pilot that you could climb higher than the normal ceiling height by moving the flaps about 20 degrees and pulling back on the stick. You could do this several times and gain an extra thousand feet. This was a great help if you did not want other aircraft dropping their bombs on you.

35th Mission 18.11.44 Munster,
5hrs. Daylight

Wing Commander Shannon led the 124 bombers from, mainly, 462 Squadron. This was a raid on the main railway station and goods yard and was outstandingly successful. The repair shops were gutted, the gasworks hit and many other buildings were destroyed. The fires were fanned by a strong wind that created a horrific firestorm with devastating results. According to Sandy, huge pillars of smoke could be seen rising to 7,000 feet after we had

bombed. We suffered severe icing and very bad weather most of the way. We were jolly glad to have arrived back in one piece. Icing was Bill's great fear as it could make the aircraft fall like a brick. As this was our last trip of our first tour we had a wonderful reception from the ground crew and also from the Group Captain and the Squadron Leader. Everyone congratulated us. I could not believe that we had finished. I kept saying to myself "wow" we have finally made it. No more wondering if this was to be my last day or my last night. My last trip! So many times when we were in strife I would say, "This is what it is like to die". It took a while to sink in. I only found out later that only a few crews had finished their tours. The reception given to the officers in our crew Bill, Don Bas, John and Sandy was rather more than they had expected. Not much was made of it in the sergeant's mess.

Bill visited the Intelligence Section today and was told that throughout our tour, our efforts had proved to be the best ever in the history of the squadron. We made bullseyes on more targets than anyone before our time.

We had completed our first tour after this trip. We were given extended leave from the 18th November 1944 until the 13th February 1945. We had to ring the squadron, however, every week to let them know where we were. Bas and I went down to "Currypool" for some time until we thought we were wearing out our welcome. We had a great time. We went carolling on Christmas Eve and visited many farms in the district. Often we were invited in to have a glass of cider and a piece of Christmas cake. Some cider had a low alcoholic content and some was as strong as whisky. Christmas dinner was quite an experience; nothing was spared in the way of good cheer. Ann and I were riding a tandem bicycle, taking turns to steer. The cider must have affected us as neither of us was steering very well. As we were careering through a small village at a good speed we nearly hit a policeman. We did not stay to hear what he was calling out to us as we were in a hurry, besides it was dangerous to put the brakes on when travelling fast over cobblestone roads.

We did not spend Christmas on the squadron but those who did had their Christmas dinner served to them in the sergeant's mess by the officers. This is a long-standing tradition in the R.A.F.

Bill and Sandy went to Ireland because Sandy was of Irish decent. They had to wear civilian clothes and they wandered about and drank a lot of Guinness. When we got back, to the squadron we were assigned to crash investigation; establishing cause and preparing reports.

One of the airmen we interviewed said that they were approaching the landing too quickly. The pilot decided to go around again and on the second approach said to the engineer. "Give her the herbs Joe", "What happened then"? "I gave her the herbs" "What happened then"? We crashed.

Bill read this out verbatim at an enquiry before some very senior officers. Most of them managed to keep straight faces.

The station cricket team consisted of English airmen and they challenged the Aussies to a game. There were only about thirty of us on the squadron and only three or four made any pretence of being cricketers, but the other team thought that we were all Don Bradmans. Bas was one of the experienced players. We certainly had the psychological advantage. Bas

and Bill went in first and Bas made 97 and Bill, 53. We were able to bowl them out pretty smartly and Bas took several quick wickets. So we upheld the reputation that our test cricketers had started.

One night as we were taking off on a trip with a full load of bombs, one of our aircraft crashed at the end of the runway, just ahead of us. Hundreds of airmen began running towards it to help until one of them stopped suddenly realizing that it might explode at any second. The others also stopped and they all ran in the other direction to safety. That was quite a funny sight. Fortunately the plane did not explode.

Our new plane was still "N" Nan but had been replaced with a Mark VI with four 1,680 hp. Bristol Hercules 100 engines with a maximum speed of 290 mph at 9,000 ft. Cruising speed 230mph at 20,000 ft. Service ceiling 22,000 ft. Range 2,500 miles.

When we returned to the station from our leave at the end of our first tour we each had to make the difficult decision whether to volunteer for a second tour or be sent back to Australia for posting to the Pacific area of combat. The stories we heard from letters from our friends in New Guinea and the Pacific Islands told us of the heat, rain, poor food, poor sleeping arrangements and tropical diseases. It was not a very enticing alternative to doing a second tour. I was promised a commission and a D.F.C. if I completed five more trips but I still had a battle to conquer my fears. After two days of indecision I decided to sign up again. Bill had already decided to do another so Bas and John the engineer agreed to do another also. Sandy was offered a job as Gunnery leader on another squadron and Don decided to go home. We were the only second tour crew on the station. Many of our friends had left when we had returned from leave. As it turned out, the war ended a month later after we had completed another eight trips and before I was awarded the commission I had been promised. It was not the same having so many officers in the crew and I was not commissioned and had to stay in the sergeants mess.

There were a number of "Odd Bods" on the squadron who had lost their crews and filled in when another crew had one of their members had been wounded, sick or had been killed.

It was hard for me to imagine having to be placed in this position, as being part of a crew was the only way that I could face the constant dangers that we experienced on each trip.

They had already suffered from losing their original crew and now they had the extra stress of finding friends among the other "Odd Bods". Most of these people were English airmen so they did not have the added problem of being a colonial; they at least had their families to go home to for their leaves. I am glad that I was not in that situation. Some of them were happy to join our crew even though we were not Englishmen. At least they knew that we had a lot of experience.

Bill "Ginge"Ollerton joined us for our second tour as the mid upper gunner. He had been in W/O Smith's crew that was shot down by a fighter and crashed near Leopoldsburg. John Grist, the Engineer, was knocked unconscious by the tailplane but somehow his parachute had opened and he was able to land without coming to any further harm. He had total memory loss for some time before he recovered. He was very happy to find that he had landed in an area that had been won back by the allies. Bill walked to a nearby farmhouse and found his navigator and wireless operator there also. The Wireless operator had fallen

through a roof into the bedroom of a young girl who was asleep in bed at the time. They were flown back to Pocklinton where they were told that the Skipper had died. Bill later married Lilian Jones a WAF from the squadron. Bill often went back to the farm through the years to see the family who had been so kind to him. Bill has since passed on a few years ago.

When we returned we were told that while we had been on leave that Pilot Officer R.Smallwood had been to Goch and they had crashed "N' Nan on the 16th of January in Belgium in the early hours and he and all of his crew were killed. The pilot W/O W.Smith was killed on the same raid, however the rest of his crew bailed out and were all uninjured except F/S Kingdom the bomb aimer who was injured. Bill Ollerton his mid-upper gunner became a member of our crew. On the 3rd of January Captain Ron Heiden and all of his crew were killed except the bomb aimer who was made a POW. His wireless operator was John Valery. The pilot was a South African and wore an army uniform. He always looked very smart, as he was tall and well built.

I was promoted to be a Warrant Officer. This meant that I was to replace the three stripes and a crown and the sparks badge on my sleeve with the Coat Of Arms on the sleeve of my forearm. I also was issued with a uniform similar in every way with officers except that the peak cap had a slightly different badge on it. The forage cap was the same.

The pay was increased as well and was the same as pilot officers. I was the senior aircrew Warrant officer on the squadron not that this gained me much advantage.

Our new rear gunner was Neil Starmer who was very fair skin and hair, he had shot down a Me410 and had confirmation as he showed us a clipping from a newspaper telling all about it.

36th Mission 25.3.45 Osnabruk,
5hrs 10mins. Daylight

Osnabruk is situated north of the Ruhr area of Germany near Munster.

We hit the Dutch coast between Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and then we caught a glimpse of a stretch of inland sea and flew over Utrecht and Arnhem, dodging most of the large cities as we flew towards the target. It was a clear day and we had a good look at the flat countryside with its green fields stretching out before us. We caused heavy damage to the marshalling yards in the older part of the town. We were able to take extremely good photographs, which showed perfect ground detail. Four aircraft failed to return. I think that this was the thirtieth plane to go down in the year we were on the squadron.

I was amazed that there was no funeral service or ceremony of any sort when an airman was killed, their belongings would just disappear just as they had, without a word from anyone. In a few days another crew would come and replace them and weeks later their memory would fade. Although some of them I can recall vividly to this day. Some of them would have no graves as they were blown into a thousand pieces.

We were lucky to have been on leave during the coldest months, but it was cold enough flying at 20,000 feet without proper heating. It was not the same operating without Don and Sandy. Now that Bas was an officer I had to make new friends outside the crew. This was not easy as most crews stuck together.

Second Tour Crew
Bill Rabbit, Doug Young, Bas Spiller
Harry Brabin, Neil Starmer, Bill Ollerton, John Allen

Stan Walker was a wireless operator from the Western district of Victoria and he and I both joined the musical society on the camp. We staged a review and one of the acts was a "Can Can" which the girls danced beautifully while the boys made a horrible mess of it without trying very hard. We had as much applause as the girls because we looked so foolish. It was quite a contrast to see how ungainly we were in comparison to the graceful young ladies. It was a hit when we did it on our own station and we were invited to repeat the performance at other nearby stations. We would go by bus and it would be quite late at night when we returned. The bus trip back was filled with song, both from that show and previous shows. Also, a lot of canoodling went on.

Several of the cast were quite professional. It was a surprise to see young girls who were normally in uniform transformed by a pretty frock and with makeup skilfully applied acting their parts with such aplomb.

I believe several of the cast became professionals after the war.

The Air Commodore, Group Captain, and the Wing Commander would always sit in the front seats on the opening night. None of the cast seemed put out by their presence.

After going over to Lissett and Elvington and other nearby stations we felt quite old hands after a while

We made many friends among the cast. As those of my crew who had volunteered to do a second tour had been made officers I was happy to make new friends. I felt pretty lonely for a while having to sleep in the hut without them.

37th & 38th Missions 4.4.45 and 8.4.45 Hamburg,
5hrs 40mins. Night

The main targets for both nights were oil storage tanks. In 1943 the RAF and the Americans had bombed Hamburg and caused a firestorm there. It was the second largest German city of over 1, 500,00 people. We used "Tallboys", which weighed five tons, on the submarine pens, which were protected by extremely thick concrete. The city is situated on the Elbe River 110 km from its mouth. So it was fairly easy to locate. It was the home of some famous musicians, Brahms and Handel among them. We did not dare to think about all of the historical buildings that we were destroying. We were attacked by some jet fighters and we had some trouble keeping them off, as our force was only forty strong. However Mustangs and Spitfires escorted us and kept them at bay. One of our aircraft was badly damaged but managed to land in Sweden where the crew were temporarily interned. We were instructed to be careful not to damage any of the residential areas, especially in the old town. Churchill must have had second thoughts about the vast damage that had been done to civilian population areas, a bit late in the day to become so particular.

The casualty rate for Lancasters was considerably lower than that of Halifaxes. Both in training and on missions. They could carry a larger bombload and had a greater range. One advantage for us was that we did not have to go to Berlin or other targets that were so far from England. It was easier to move around in the Halifax, as the spars were not so obtrusive.

39th & 41st Missions 9.4.45 and 13.4.45 Flesburg,
5hrs 20mins. Night

These were "Gardening" Missions: dropping mines on the Kiel Canal on U boat pens and depot ships. Although the flak was as bad as ever there was little fighter activity. We had concentrated our efforts to keep fighter numbers down and it now was having a good effect. It was quite frightening to fly between the towering cliffs beside some fiords in the dark at low level. It all looked very dark to me and quite eerie. We could see flashes caused by bombs being dropped in the distance on the way back. They told us that this would happen. " The Germans would be concentrating on the big show and not worrying about us. The Kiel Canal did not have cliffs to worry us and was quite easy to see.

40th Mission 11.4.45 Nuremburg,
4hrs 10mins. Daylight

The target was marshalling yards at an intersection of several traffic routes. Five of us were damaged by flak. However we all managed to return to base. Two of our engines were not operating and we had to lose considerable height in order to make it back. This was a real heart in the mouth experience. It would have been ironic to lose out so close to the end of the war. F/O Heinrick, from South Australia, shot down a fighter on this trip. I guess he was of German descent. Some of the Jewish airmen changed their names so that they would not be shot if they had to bail out. I wondered how the Germans felt when a man of German descent became a prisoner of war.

42nd Mission 18.4.45 Heligoland,
4hrs 35mins. Daylight

Heligoland is an island off the German coast with very high steep cliffs and caves underneath which were used as submarine pens. We used to often fly near and over Heligoland Their anti-aircraft guns never failed to take shots at us. There wasn't a thing we could do about it as we had already bombed our targets and felt pretty safe out over the sea. When the Wing Commander announced that we were to bomb Heligoland, a great roar of approval went up. There was also an aerodrome there with a squadron of ME 109 fighters. Heinz Knoke, a German ace who shot down 52 allied planes, was the leader of it. He had introduced a tactic of dropping bombs from above the bomber stream so that they exploded in their midst. Sometimes he was able to bring down three planes with one bomb. There were 1,000 aircraft on the Heligoland raid and at first the anti-aircraft fire was heavy, but as plane after plane dropped its load chipping huge pieces off the cliffs, the guns below slowed until eventually they stopped altogether. This trip was almost like a holiday as it was a sparkling sunny day.

At this time the end of the war began to seem imminent. Our Mosquitoes were bombing Berlin mercilessly, for thirty nights in succession, each carrying 10,000 lbs of bombs.

Nearly half of all the bombs dropped by Bomber Command during the war were dropped between September 1944 and May 1945.They flew higher than other bombers so that they were out of range of most of the flak.

43rd Mission 25.4.45 Wangerooge,
4 hrs 10mins. Daylight

Wangerooge was an island at the mouth of the Elbe River near Hamburg. There were coastal gun batteries on it to protect naval boats and installations in the Heligoland Bight. They had been particularly destructive to our bombers, so we were all delighted to hear that there was to be a massive raid by nearly 2,000 bombers on this target. The flak that greeted us was, as usual, very concentrated. However, as our bombs reached the target, the anti-aircraft fire slowed and eventually stopped. We were well back in the stream and in a good position to see the effect the attack was having. I had been instructed to operate a huge movie camera but I found it too heavy for me to handle. When I relayed this to Bill, he told me to forget it. It was a pity as it was a perfect day without a cloud in sight. The photographic section people made some caustic comments on my lack of strength, but I was not too concerned.

This was our last bombing trip as the Germans capitulated over the next few days.

We had two more trips in "N for Nan". We flew over the targets in the Ruhr area where we had bombed. We flew at a very low level, not our usual 20,000 feet. We were appalled at the devastation. There was mile after mile of rubble and any remaining buildings were merely gutted shells. In the past it had been necessary to stifle thoughts of the damage we were doing, and who we were killing, but I was now overwhelmed with sadness that man could be so inhumane.

We were told when we were being briefed for a mission that the target was a ball bearing factory or oil refinery when in fact we bombed many large towns and cities indiscriminately.

The contrast between flying over the Ruhr with shells bursting all around and trying to avoid searchlights and dodging our own aircraft, watching to see that we were not hit by our own aircraft bombing from above was so great compared with, say, going to a dance or sitting in the sun. One moment we were filled with excitement and greatly fearful and the next moment back in ordinary day-to-day life. This for me at least was a hard adjustment to make. Then there was the anticlimax when the war ended. The adjustments we had to make upon our return to civilian life were extreme.

I thought about all the families that had been killed and had their homes destroyed. Also that we had flattened buildings that had taken centuries to build. The subtitle to a RAF magazine summed it up. It said, "It stops that thinking feeling". This is what we had managed to do up to this point. Now all those thoughts came flooding in. There followed a period of deep soul-searching as a reaction to the horror of such destruction. The stress that I suffered is something from which I have never fully recovered. To this day I have a low tolerance to stress in any form.

A total of 167 Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded during the war to airmen on our squadron and also 5 Distinguished Service Orders. These medals could only be awarded to officers. Five of my crew received them. This was the greatest number of DFC's awarded to one crew that I know of. Our second tour crew did not receive any medals. Only those who operated prior to the time we started operations were entitled to the Air Crew Europe Star.

Losses of aircraft on Ceylon Squadron during this war were as follows:

In 1939 5 aircraft
In 1940 32 aircraft
In 1941 53 aircraft
In 1942 63 aircraft
In 1943 81 aircraft
In 1944 71 aircraft
In 1945 16 aircraft

Altogether 1015 (729 while operating from Pocklington) 102 squadron members were killed during the war, 319 were taken prisoner 47 were injured and 22 escaped custody or escaped capture.195 were killed in the year I was operating. The average strength on the squadron was about two hundred airmen.

On a more positive note 2,000 Australian airmen married English women, most of them to WAF's. Most of the aircrew had girlfriends, many had several. I suppose that this made up for all of the Australian girls who married Americans.

We then flew up to the north of Scotland, flying low over the cliffs on the east coast. I sat in the bomb-aimer's seat in the clear plastic nose of the aircraft. It was a beautiful day and it was like flying on a magic carpet, as there was very little vibration or noise. Beaches and headlands and small fishing villages unfolded before us. As we arrived at our destination we could see a number of aircraft under the water at the end of the runway. We wondered what stories lay buried with each one.

Our beloved aircraft, "N" for Nan, was lined up with so many others in this aircraft graveyard. We felt so sad to have to leave her after all these months. She had flown nearly sixty missions when we left her; each small bomb was painted on her side. I wish that we still had her now; she would be worth a fortune. Back at camp we had to hand back some items that had been issued to us such as the navigators watches. It was really remarkable how many of them had been lost only in the last few days. Bas had lent me his own "Incabloc" watch and I returned it to him so he could give back his issue one.

R.A.A.F. Casualties in all theatres:

- Pilots 5,131
- Navigators 2,312
- W.A.G's 2,328
- Air Gunners 1,210
- Total Australians killed in Bomber Command in the U.K. Killed 3,486

As there were twice as many Air Gunners in each crew there loss rate was much less than other aircrew.

Fighter Command 191 Coastal Command 408. Killed in Europe 5,397 .I have only listed in this diary the airmen who were killed in the year that I was on the squadron and not the 800 who were killed before my time. When I considered the fact that 55 Million Russians had been killed by the Germans as well as killing the Jews and Gypsies and Poles to mention just a few. I don't suppose the number of Germans that we had killed was very great in comparison. I think that both the Germans and Japanese have learnt that war can be disastrous to those who start it.

We were posted from Pocklington to Gamston in Nottinghamshire. Thousands of Australian aircrew were seated together in a hangar: 605 officers, 400 warrant officers and 282 sergeants. There were speeches and the announcement that we were being sent home. Those who had completed the most Missions would go first. They called for those who had done fifty Missions or more (about 5), then 49, 48 - down to 43. When Bill, Bas and I went out there were only about fifteen airmen ahead of us. A total of 421 men went home on the first draft.

We went on leave to London and were there on "Victory Europe Day"; 8th May 1945. There were so many people in the streets we could hardly move. We went to Buckingham Palace and saw the Royal Family make an appearance on the balcony. Groups formed long chains and danced along holding the hips of the one in front.

I became separated from the others and went into a small pub to escape the throng. There was another Australian in there so I joined him for a drink. His name was Don Elder. I asked him where he lived in Australia. He said he had been so long in the army he had almost forgotten, but his last address had been 48 Kangaroo Street, Manly. Our family had moved into this house just as he had moved out. His brother had been in my class at school.

I met Alan Scanlon a friend from back home. I went around with his sister Nell for a while. He had been a prisoner of war in Germany. He and several others had "borrowed" a Mercedes Benz after their release and filled it with looted binoculars, knives, cameras etc. They left the car in France but managed to bring the rest of it home. They said that looting was rampant at the end of the war. The worst offenders were the French. I was amazed at

the ex prisoners sense of humour. They though that everything was very funny. I expect that after what they had been through to be alive and back in England everything was.

Alan was among the 9.838 airmen from Bomber Command who had been in German prisons.

Alan told me about a fellow prisoner of war who was a WAG who was told by his pilot to check on the mid upper gunner after two fighters had attacked them. He found the gunner dead, and as he turned around he saw that the front of the plane was on fire and the pilot was climbing through the escape hatch. His parachute was burning in the conflagration and he retreated as far as possible towards the tail and waited for the end. However as the flames crept towards him there was a loud explosion and the front half of the plane disintegrated and left the tail intact and the heat had subsided. He sat there in the tail unit looking out at a clear sky at 9000 feet. For some reason the tail did not plunge down as the tail had some lift from the rudders and the tail gave it some stability. It came spiralling down like a leaf. Sgt. Stannard braced himself against the sides of the fuselage and thought that this was a much more pleasant way to die rather than being burnt to death.

He looked out over the Dutch landscape he could see the houses and canals and realised that he was descending much faster than he thought. Fortunately he landed on some pine trees that were about 100 feet high and this slowed him down so that he eventually arrived on the ground without a bump. He was happy to spend the next two years in a POW camp alive and well.

Our trip back home on a crowded troopship was an anti-climax. We were only allowed ten pounds each in cash and very quickly most of the money belonged to four airmen who played poker, bidding up in fifty pounds. I kept my ten pounds and bought an Omega watch when we landed in New Zealand. I kept this watch for many years and eventually sold it for a hundred dollars, even though it was not working. I visited my Uncle Les who had a small jewellery shop in Wellington. His son, Graham, was a Flight Lieutenant pilot who had remained in New Zealand as an instructor.

When we arrived in Sydney, the wharf was crowded with friends and relatives welcoming us back, but we were not allowed to disembark for one hour until the Governor General, the Duke of Gloucester arrived to make a speech. We all booed his late arrival when he came aboard.

My mother and my sisters, Florrice and Joan, were there to meet me. Joan had grown from a 14-year-old to a 17-year-old and was now taller than me.

Within a few days we were given a medical examination at Bradfield Park (which took about ten minutes) and discharged with three months' pay.

I felt lost for quite some time and missed the companionship of my crew. Also I had been in uniform for three years so it was a shock to be back in civilian clothes with nothing to do. I had started out in the Air Force as an ACII and was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman then Sergeant, then Flight Sergeant, then Warrant Officer. I was now back to where I started and that was an odd feeling.

I was able to go back to my old job at Angus and Robertson Ltd but it wasn't the same. Most of the staff were new to me. Dick Thompson, who had worked in the fiction section, had joined up at the same time as I did. Dick became a Spitfire pilot and was shot down over the Mediterranean. He was one of many that did not return. I always admired Dick

who was an amateur wrestler and very fit. He was a gentle giant and I am amazed that he was able to fit into a Spitfire cockpit.

Working at a bookshop I could not help but read some of the many books written by Jewish people and others about the horrors that they suffered.

It was a great experience working in this old established bookshop with people who had been there since before the First World War. All of the directors and heads of departments were near or past retirement age. Mr.Cousins and Mr.Jones were the eldest I expect. There was a Mr Cramp who was in charge of special orders who was the eldest of them all. His office, next to the education department was like something left over from the Charles Dickens era.

The firm was to be sold and divided up into lots so I obtained the position as manager of Grenville Publishing Company much to the amazement of my boss Hedley Jeffreys.

I was lucky and went on to marry a lovely girl, Val, and fathered three beautiful children. They are a great joy to me. I now have ten grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Between them all they have 20 academic degrees and three more are still at university and two are finishing school shortly so I am extremely grateful that I was able to live through it all, when so many of those who joined up didn't make it back.

Unlike men who joined the army or navy we were separated when we finished at Bradfield Park. I was again separated when I had my appendix removed in Canada. Separated again when I was posted to West Freugh in Scotland, Again when I went to Driffield and again when I went with my new crew to Marston Moor. Then only four of the first tour crew flew on the second tour. The Australians in our first tour crew have had two reunions, one in Adelaide and another in Sydney and after Bill died we had one in Brisbane. Bill's son Michael attended this one in place of his father. When our tour finished at the end of the war we were separated again so that apart from our crew who came from different parts of England and from Bowen in North Queensland to Penola in South Australia. I did not have any friends after the war to hold reunions with on Anzac Day.

Bas and friends on D Day
The car in the background was the crew car.

I have written the following poem, which is dedicated to the one hundred and ninety five airmen in my squadron killed while I was there. Giving their lives for our continuing freedom.

"Per Ardua Ad Astra" is the Australian Air Force Motto.
It means "Through Hard Work To the Stars"
Young men reaching for the stars.
For a better world they strive
First steps on the way to Mars,
Keep their memories alive.
Per Ardua Ad Astra.

How they sought to soar on high,
Breaking through the cords that bind
Reach the heights,or they may die,
This they do for all mankind.
Per Ardua Ad Astra

Fly all the flags at half-mast,
Let us stand still and reflect
On all those men who have passed,
And show for them our respect.
Per Ardua Ad Astra.

Pocklington Yorkshire

Motto “Tentate et perficite”(“Attempt and achieve “)

In 1942 the squadron was equipped with Halifaxes replacing the Whitleys, which had an unacceptable loss rate. It had moved from Topcliffe to Pocklington In August 1942 and remained there until the end of the war.

The code letters were “DY” and this was painted on the side of each aircraft. Each of the 26 aircraft on the squadron was marked with a letter of the alphabet. We flew “N” Nan in both our first and second tours. We flew Mark III and then Mark VI, which had Hercules 100 engines, which had 1,680 horsepower.

Squadron Song

And when you came to 102
And think that you might get right through
There’s many a ..... who thought like you
It’s foolish but its fun

Friday -The lucky survivor

Valerie and Harry in Japan

Val Metford and Dina 1973

63 years on Bas, Michael Bill's Son, Harry, Sandy, Don, Brisbane 2008

This is a poem that I wrote about one of the most extraordinary experiences that I heard about during the war. The Welsh pilot had already done a tour on Wellingtons in the Middle East and had been made an instructor. However he applied to go on a second tour so they gave him the job of flying a B-17 Fortress loaded with jamming equipment. His mission was to fly above the enemy's bombers when they were bombing and disrupt their radar and radio. Generally this could be a pretty soft job except that on a trip over Lutzendorf refinery he was hit by flak and, as there was no noticeable damage, he turned for home. As he reached the point fifty miles east of the Rhine, the number two engine caught fire and they could not put it out. What followed was one of the most unusual tales ever told in R.A.F. history.

JohnWynne

"Get ready to bail out," the pilot cried "
The number two engine has caught on fire.
Just wait until we are over on our side,
Pass over the Rhine before we retire."
The navigator spoke, "We're there now Skip".
Number two engine was shaking badly.
Well, now is the time to abandon ship.
"Every man for himself", he said sadly.

The crew bailed out in an orderly way.
He now felt quite happy the way things were
And decided that he should head for home.
He felt he could make it by nursing her,
And watched for fighters through the astrodome
But still he did not know which course to steer,
He set the trim so he could fly quite straight,
Then took some deep breaths to quieten his fear,
He would now have to try and navigate.
So he made a quick dash to get some maps,
But found he needed other things too,
He made more trips without mishaps,

The pilot set the trim ready to go,
His oxygen tube was caught on a stay,
And the plane was diving down far too low.
Still standing he grabbed the controls once more.
He then undressed to get rid of the tube,
He puzzled a while to figure the score,
He tried to keep calm so as not to boob.
When suddenly the connecting rod broke,
And the fire in the engine went out too,
There wasn't even any sign of smoke
No worries now of a windmilling screw.
And he wished that he had not lost his crew.
Then on the third trip down he snagged his chute,
The strands were caught up in his flying boot,
He was tangled up in parachute lines,
He untangled himself from its confines.
He settled back in the pilot's seat
And decided then to make for England.
To have survived so far was quite a feat,

He would have to find a place to land.
He saw some fog and thought it was the sea,
Then he realised that it was just fog.
And that was good as he was wind free.
So there was no deviation to log.
Then he saw that he had reached Beachy Head.
That was glowing a dull grey in the night.
Boy was he glad he wasn't dead.
Was able to bring home his faithful kite.
He asked to land at a R.A.F. field.
But he landed at Bassingbourn instead
When to the end of the runway he wheeled

The spinning prop came off but missed his head.
The American drome he landed on
Gave him the biggest breakfast of his life.
He so wished his crew had not gone.
But was glad he had got through all that strife.
Sadly his crew did not get off so well,
As most of them were killed by irate Huns
For where they landed was a German hell
Those of us who lived are the lucky ones.

by Harry Brabin.

Pocklington Control Tower

The following were killed in the year I was on 102 Squadron

Sgt T. Eburne Sgt J.Welsh W/o G. Jekyll F/o D.Lillington F/o V. Hillrich
Sgt. R. Downs Sgt. T. Roger Sgt.J.Catterwell Sgt T. Florent F/s R. Singleton
Sgt. S. Thomas F/S M.McNamara F/S P. Robson Sgt N. Lishman Sgt. J. Francis
Sgt. H. Smith F/O A. Maxwell F/O W. Rushworth Sgt. R. Peel Sgt. P. Stamper
Sgt. M. Amstein Sgt. L. McKenna Sgt. E Walker F/s J. Kelso Sgt.J.Gibson
Sgt T. Hill Sgt.R. Bartram Sgt G. Jennings Sgt. N. Howarth Sgt.A. Smith
F/S E. Braddock Sgt. W. Reid Sgt. R. Putt Sgt. J.Booker Sgt.E Finch Sgt. G. Hadfield
Sgt.E.Zaccheo Sqn Ldr. D. Fisher DFC DFM F/O A. Striowski P/O Burglass
F/O L.Watts F/L E. Cooke Sgt.P.Parker Sgt.K.Clough Sgt.A.Barr F/S A. Duggleby
Sgt. H. Wakeford Sgt.W. Chapman Sgt.F.Bowman Sgt.J.Bender Sqn Ldr. G. Treasure
F/O S. Bailey F/O G. Frazer Sgt. R. Collins Sgt. L. Archer Sgt. B. Bland
Sgt. D. Sykes F/S N. Campell F/S N. Pardon P/O H. Rogers F/S L. Williams
W/O R. Wilson P/O R. Messer F/S J. Ligertwood P/O L. Potter Sgt. G. Frost
P/O G. Mulvaney Sgt. J. Miller F/S J. Duell Sgt.G. Smith Sgt. B. Jardine
Sgt.W. White Sgt. D. Dales Sgt. K. Robinson Sgt. J. Woodward Sgt. R. Lucas
Sgt. W. Partridge Sgt. F. Singleton P/O W. Donald F/S N. Brand F/S R. Lathlean
Sgt. R. Skeats F/S D Rogers Sgt. W. Cook F/S A.Page Sgt R. Simpson Sgt. F. Court
Sgt. R. Leyland Sgt. E.Ord Sgt. J. Watkinson F/S. J. Hulme F/Sgt H. Riddle
F/S L. Jarrat Sgt. G. MatthewsF/S M. Nielsen Sgt. F. Booker Sgt.G. Herbert
Sgt. A. Curphey Sgt. J. Craig F/L P. Young F/O K. Walker F/s R. Osbourne
F/S J. York Sgt.J. Finney Sgt J. Gordon F/S.A. Harvey Sgt. J. Doughty
F/S L.Coughland F/O W. Peldow Sgt. F. Heal Sgt C. Townsend Sgt G. Todd
Sgt. L. O'Toole Sgt. H. Brown P/O P. Groves Sgt. L. Duncan Capt. R. Thompson
F/S G Reader Sgt. R. White W/O H. Locke Sgt. G. Greening Sgt. G.Gibson
Sgt. R. Aitchison Lt J. Begbie F/O H. Worden Sgt. C. Jauncey F/O J. Redmond
P/O J. Picken F/S W. Wilson P/O J. Binstead P/O N. Pearmain Sgt. F. Lightfowler
F/o A. Cameron F/O R. Hudson F/O M. Frobisher F/O E. Bolton Sgt. J. Wilby
Sgt E. Swart Sgt T. Jones F/O E. Roberts Sgt J. Williams Sgt J. Simpson
P/o E. Hislop F/S J. Sherridan F/O C. Smith F/S E. Stevens F/S H. Dunphy
Sgt C. Aune P/o J. Shirley Sgt W. Shaw Sgt J. Harding F/S R. English W/O R. Jones
Sgt S. Franklin Capt. R. Heiden F/S W. Quill F/S J. Valery Sgt G. Johns Sgt R. Jones
F/S M. Tyler Sgt P. Morgan Sqn Ldr A. Jarand W/o J. Galbraith P/o E. Davies
P/o L/ Carter F/S T. Telfer Sgt J. Wilson Sgt E. Pope P/O R. Smallwood
F/O W. Russell F/O B. James Sgt P. Hewitt Sgt J. Lennon Sgt W. Scott
Sgt J. Gallacher W/O W. Smith F/O J. Hurley F/S H. Briggs Sgt J. Smith
Sgt T. Cooney F/O R. Jeff Sgt J. Sutherland F/S W. Birkett Sgt G. Grimsdell
Sgt G. Emmerson Sgt E. Hick F/S J. Frazer F/L S. Dalmais Sgt R. Frost Sgt J. Milne
Sgt W. Bradshaw Sgt R. Williams F/L E. Robinson F/O W. Marquis F/O S. Brown
F/S A. Miller F/S R. Lewis