

THE EARLY YEARS

I was born on the 8th of August 1919 at 13 Bearhope Street, Greenock, Scotland and Christened Samuel Craig Tait and was the fourth of six children to George and Kate Tait. The others being: John, George, Robert, Eric and Esther. Like many households, times were hard as money was scarce and work even more scarce. The 1920's and early thirties were the times of the depression and my family struggled to make ends meet. I began my schooling at the Ardgowan School and when I was twelve years old I moved to the Mount School. Eric and Esther went from the Mount School to the Finnart School. Both schools were in Greenock. My father who served in the Great War with the Seaforth Highlanders and who had a reputation both in the army and out as a man who would never back away from a fight, let that trait interfere into his family life. I recall when I was quite young, seeing the police 'Black Maria' arriving where there was a crowd of people. In the middle of the crowd was my father calmly stoking his pipe with three unconscious policemen slumped on the ground in front of him. Other policemen soon hauled him away in the 'Black Maria'. I left school in 1933 at the age of fourteen and found work on the Clyde working for Scott Company Ship Builders as a Plater's helper, which really meant carrying the plater's equipment and doing all the general labouring for him. My wages when I started were 10/4d per week (52p). Out of this I gave my mother the 9/ and I kept the 1/4d.

In 1935 there was a huge expansion of war work due to the threat of yet another war with Germany. The company that I worked for were later to build the warships, Glasgow, and Galatea (cruisers) Hotspur, Hostile, and Punjab (destroyers) also the submarine Cachelot. I stayed at Scotts for about five years until I decided to try and find work elsewhere. I had heard there was plenty of work with higher pay in England and in particular in Coventry. So in 1938 I broke my ties with my family and Scotland and headed south. I found myself some digs with a Mr. and Mrs. Docherty of Fir Tree Avenue in Coventry and was lucky enough to get a job with Charles Weston Engineering, which among other things produced 'Gits' oil seals. I was now earning £2.10s (£2. 50p) per week, almost five times the amount I was earning on the Clyde. It was while I was working at Westons that I met Joyce Johnson a girl who also worked at the factory. Joyce was eventually to become my wife, but that was for the future.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 I immediately thought of joining the RAF. From being a small boy I had wanted to join the air force, and so off I went to enlist. To my dismay and disappointment I was told I worked in heavy engineering and in a reserved occupation and therefore I could not join the armed services. This did not stop me wanting to join up and I was determined to get into the RAF one way another. So on the 10th of April, 1940 knowing that I was still 'reserved' I went to the nearest recruiting office and volunteered for the Royal Air Force.

After a series of tests and a medical I was accepted. I sat an exam to test which trade group I might be better employed and naturally engineering was 'their' choice. As a result of my exam and background skill and knowledge I was selected for training as an engine mechanic. I had achieved my aim. I was now in the RAF. In the back of my mind I felt that some one would try and get my release to put me back in the factory and I wondered how long I would have to wait before the RAF called. It wasn't long. On the 25th of April, 1940 I received a letter and a railway warrant telling me to report to RAF Cardington in Bedfordshire. I was on my way. From then on I was known as:

1160996 Aircraftman 2nd Class (AC2) S.C. Tait

SERVICE LIFE BEGINS

Cardington was seething with hundreds of other airmen like myself all looking slightly bemused and some even looking lost. I suppose I was no different, but I was determined to get on with it. I was kitted out with all the paraphernalia that is deemed necessary for airmen to look the part. At Cardington we were all subjected to the treatment that could be given to a civvie to convert him into a passable serviceman. Within the first couple of days we were introduced to 'Square bashing' which is the RAF jargon for drill, with it's 'Up 1-2-3!

Down 1-2-3! Halt! Salute! and all the other intricacies of learning how to march RAF style. When we were not marching we were folding blankets, shining boots and polishing anything and everything. In short, learning the art of 'Bullshit' most of it of the baffling variety.



There were corporal and sergeant drill instructors (DI's) bawling indistinct and at times contradictory orders at this bewildered and slightly scared 'Sprog' recruits. We all soon got the drift of what those instructors meant and eventually we were slowly turned into real RAF types. Our weekly pay as an AC2 was 2/- (10p) per week which was quite a drop for me after my job in Coventry, but we were all in the same position and it didn't matter to me as I was now in the RAF. After six weeks of square bashing and orders and bullshit, I was posted to RAF Digby in Lincolnshire. This was what was called a 'Holding Unit'. A holding unit was a station where would be RAF tradesmen were sent until there was a trade training course available.

A couple of weeks later I was posted to Squires Gate Airport Blackpool to begin my course to train as an engine mechanic. I was at Squires Gate for almost six months learning the technicalities of aero engines and the component parts. We were given leave at intervals and I used to go back to Coventry to visit Joyce. One night I remember in particular, the 14th of November 1941, the first devastating air raid on that city. As the train pulled into the station,

the air raid sirens began to wail. I got off the train and walked with two soldiers along the platform out into the street. Then the bombs began to fall. All three of us made a rush for the nearest air raid shelter, only to find it full to overflowing with civilians. All three of us spent a freezing night, half in and half out of the shelter. The devastation of the raid was unbelievable. The leave went all too quickly and in no time I was on my way back to Blackpool. I continued my studies and practical training and time passed. With my experience in engineering both on the Clyde and in Coventry, I learnt quickly and passed the course without difficulty. Early in 1941 I completed the course and was promoted to Aircraftman 1st Class (AC1) and posted to RAF Bramcote near Nuneaton in Warwickshire. RAF Bramcote was the home of No. 180 (Polish) Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.). Joyce and I were married on June 21st 1941 and set up home with her mother in Coventry. I wasn't long at Bramcote before a posting to No. 458 Wellington Squadron based at Holme on Spalding Moor in Yorkshire came through. I hardly had time to settle down there before I was sent on my engine fitter's course at Blackpool. I successfully passed the course and acquired the rank of Leading Aircraftman (LAC) and returned to Holme on Spalding Moor. Once more I was on the move to No. 3 Air Gunnery School at West Freugh, Scotland. Aircraft operating from West Freugh were the ageing Blackburn Botha and the Fairey Battle, with the odd Lysander. These first two aircraft had been withdrawn from active service, as they were now obsolete and slow. Two particularly funny stories come to mind while I was there. The first involved one of the instructors. He ordered one of the staff to flood the carburettors on the engine of a Battle so that he could fill his cigarette lighter. He filled his lighter and immediately sparked it up. There was a whoosh! The petrol and the Battle went up in flames. It was burnt out in no time. I can't recall what happened to the instructor who caused the fire, but it created a lot of amusement for the trainees. The other tale involved myself. I was instructed to remove and replace the starter motor of a Lysander. The starter motor of the Lysander is situated in a very awkward place requiring an articulation in the fingers and wrist that isn't there. The motor was heavy and couldn't be held by one hand alone, so I filled the space with rags, my overalls and a half house brick. This was so I could lay the motor on it when I had freed it. I replaced the new motor and signed the aircraft as serviceable. Sometime later, a pilot came to me with a parachute and said, "Come with me". We took off in the Lysander and as he turned there was a thump! "Do you know what that is?" he asked. "A half house brick" I replied. He landed and told me to sort it out, which I did. I removed the half brick and my overalls. Could have been worse I suppose.

It was at this time when I heard news of my youngest brother Eric. It was now December and he told me that he had been called up and was now in the army, the Royal Signals.



In early 1942 I was posted to RAF Monain North Wales. I was at least a little nearer to Joyce especially as she was expecting a baby. Patricia was born on the 27th of November. There was an Air Ministry promulgation that the aircrew position of Observer, which was an all round crew position, was being phased out and a new crew position was being created. The new position was that of Flight Engineer. Volunteers were asked to come forward to fill these new positions, (All aircrew were volunteers) especially those in the ground engineering trades. My mind began to think about volunteering for aircrew, but for the time being I held back.

In March 1943 I decided I wanted to fly and I applied for training as a Flight Engineer. I sat the entrance exam, passed the medical and was accepted, and began the second phase of my RAF career. I was sent to St. Athan near Cardiff where the ground training for Flight Engineers was given. Here I met Sam Godfrey who was to become my best friend and with whom I was to go to squadron service with.

We were taught all aspects of aircraft systems. One of the aircraft was the Handley Page Halifax, a four-engine bomber with six fuel tanks. An instructor asked a u/t F/Engineer a series of questions, which went something like this.

Q. What would you do if a cannon shell hit No. 1 tank.

A. Switch to No. 2 tank.

Q. What would you do if a cannon shell hit No. 2 tank.

A. Switch to No. 3 tank...and so on until they reached a cannon shell in No. 6 tank.

A. Switch to No. 7 tank.

The instructor asked where did you get that No. 7 tank.

A. From the same place you are getting all those bloody cannon shells!

After eight weeks of intense ground training I finally passed out as:

Sergeant S.C.Tait Flight/Engineer



I now proudly sported the coveted 'E' Engineer winged brevet on my left breast. Being a member of the Sergeants Mess gave me a rise in pay from 2/6 per day to 9/6 (47 1/2 p) per day. Before we all left St. Athan we had to be graded into which aircraft we were to be Flight Engineers. There were four choices: Lancaster, Halifax, Stirling and Sunderland. I suggested to Sam Godfrey that we should both volunteer for the Halifax as there was bound to be a rush for the favourite, the Lancaster. Straight away they took several blokes from that queue and tagged them onto the Sunderland and Stirling queue. We were kept in the line for the Halifax, so from then on Sam Godfrey and I were destined to fly with the Halifax. There was one sad note. When the course results were read out one chap who had failed the course was so distraught, that he deliberately walked into the spinning propeller of an aircraft. Sam Godfrey and I were posted to RAF Rufforth, home to No. 1663 Halifax Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU) a few miles from the city of York. These flying training stations within Bomber Command were called : "Con Units" by the aircrew. This is where all the different positions were brought together to form crews and then to train as a unit to prepare for bombing operations. I soon found a crew and they were:

Pilot:.....Sgt. Bill Bruce.....from London

Navigator:.....F/O Jack White.....from Kilburn

Wireless/Operator:.....Sgt. Johnny Hepburn.....from Edinburgh

Bomb Aimer:.....Sgt. Ray Slann.....from Birmingham

Mid/Upper Gunner:.....Sgt. Ned Richardson.....from Northampton

Rear Gunner:.....Sgt. Ken Batten.....from Romford

Within a few days of arriving at Rufforth we were airborne learning to fly as a crew. The role of the Flight Engineer is to work along side

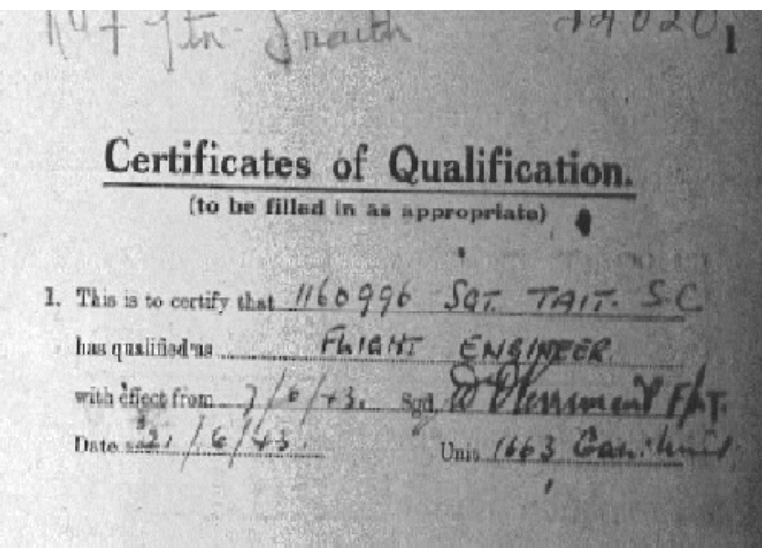


and with the pilot to keep the aeroplane in a good flying state and to monitor the fuel systems, control the fuel transfer, operate the throttles when needed, keeping the aircraft in trim. I was also taught how to land the aircraft if ever the pilot might be incapacitated. The Flight Engineer sits next to the pilot on every take off (he stands next to him on the bombing run). The Flight Engineer has to be proficient at Morse Code with a minimum speed of 12 words per minute, and be able to man a gun turret if the need ever arose. In short the Flight Engineer is a Jack of all trades and is almost constantly at work during the flight. It must be said that no one crew member is more important than another. It is teamwork that gets a bomber to the target and back safely. This must never be forgotten.

The training at the Con Unit involved day and night flying in Mk I, II & V Halifaxes. I was taught the 'take off' procedure. On the take off run the engineer opens the throttles with his hands on the lower part of the lever to allow the pilot to take over. He then adjusts the 'Boost' to the engines increasing and decreasing when need be until the aircraft is safely airborne and at a safe altitude. From then on it is constant monitoring of the instruments and the altitude of the aircraft. Going into the bombing run is when the pilot, bomb aimer and the engineer work closely together. As the bomb aimer calls corrections in track co-ordinates to the pilot, the engineer stands next to the pilot ready to take the controls if need be. It is also his job to open the bomb doors and to close them after the bombs have gone. The same procedure for the

return leg is carried out.

I recall one night on one of my early training flights when we trained with other crews. We were waiting to take off at the end of the runway and we seemed to be waiting for an age. I suggested to a Sgt. Storm, a Norwegian that we climb out of the rear door and light up a fag. This we did and stood near the tail plane. At that moment the pilot, Sgt. Hoverstad, another Norwegian, applied full power and began the take off run. The tail plane knocked us both to the ground as it sped away along the runway. Neither of us was hurt but we began to panic. We decided to get to the other end of the runway as quickly as possible and meet the Hali as it landed. We lay on the grass waiting until it came rumbling towards us. We climbed on board as if nothing had happened. Fortunately for us it was night time and very dark. I never tried that one again.



The rates of pay for sergeant aircrew in 1943 were: Pilot: 13/6 per day (67p) Navigator: 13/6 per day (67p) Bomb Aimer: 13/6 per day (67p) Flight Engineer: 12/- (60p) Wireless Operator: 8/9 per day (43p) Air Gunner: 8/6 per day (42p). These rates of pay might seem rather low and inadequate for the tasks that they were performing, but it must be remembered that they were serving their country in time of war and therefore money did not come into it. They were all volunteers.

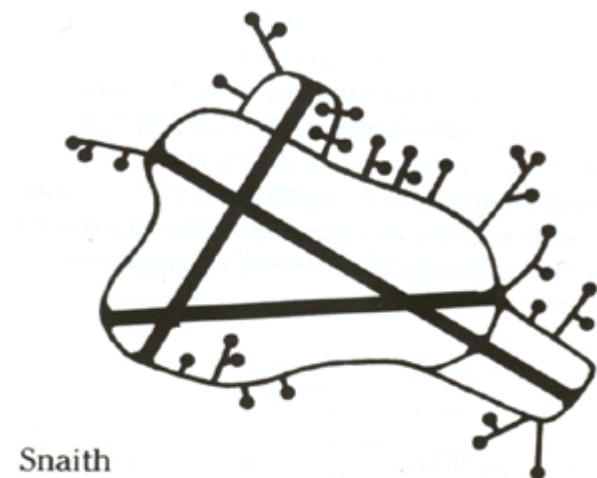
On the 7th of June 1943 after eight weeks of intense and demanding training at the Con Unit, we as a crew, had flown 44 hrs. 35 mins. of day flying and 13 hrs. 55 mins. night flying and we were finally assessed as a competent crew. We awaited a posting to a squadron. On the 21st of June we were going to 51 Squadron.

51 SQUADRON

51 Squadron was formed at Thetford on 15 May 1916 as a Home Defence Squadron. Initially the Squadron flew a mixed group of BE 2c, BE 2d, and BE 12s before specialising in night fighter duties with the first FE 2b, and later the Avro 504K, which was converted to a single seat night fighter. In addition, the Squadron used the DH4 to give night flying training to aircrew destined to join other squadrons in France. The Squadron disbanded in June 1919, but reformed in March 1937 with the Vickers Virginia and the Avro Anson. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, the Squadron re-equipped with the Whitley III. War was declared at 11:00 hours on 3 September 1939, and on the same day the Squadron took part in a leaflet raid over the Hamburg area, which was the first occasion that RAF aircraft penetrated into Germany during the war. In March 1940, the Squadron took part in the first Bomber Command attack on a land target in Germany when the seaplane base at Hornum was raided. The Squadron was also involved in the first attack on Italy when, on the night of the 11 June, the marshalling yards in Turin were the target. Another first occurred in 1941, when parachutists were dropped into southern Italy. A further airborne operation took place in February 1942 when paratroopers attacked and captured equipment from the Station at Bruneval. In May 1942 the Squadron was attached to Coastal Command and is credited with several attacks on U-boats, including the confirmed damage to U-256. In October 1942, the Squadron returned to Bomber Command and re-equipped with Halifax IIs. From this time until the end of war the Squadron played an active part in the many mass raids by Bomber Command, both against targets in Germany and operations in support of D-Day landings and the Allied advance through France. Following the cessation of hostilities, the Squadron was engaged in transport duties with the Stirling and York aircraft. These duties included the repatriation of Far East POWs and the Berlin Airlift.



51 Halifax Squadron, Bomber Command was one of many squadrons in 4 Group based in South Yorkshire. The airfield was actually in the village of Pollington near the town of Selby some twenty miles south of York. Due to there being another bomber station in the Group named Pocklington, it was decided that the village of Snaith almost adjoining Pollington was to be the name of the station. This was done for operational and safety reasons, to prevent the call sign Pollington becoming mixed up with Pocklington. Snaith was built in the late 1930s as the threat of war loomed. The squadron at Snaith before the arrival of 51 was 150 Squadron, which had been part of the Advanced Air Striking Force in France in 1940, flying Fairey Battles and Wellingtons. Later 150 was posted to the Middle East and then disbanded to reform as a Lancaster squadron in 1944.



to attention as he stood in front of us. The curtain was drawn back and a red piece of string on a large map stretched from Snaith across northern Europe, across Scandinavia towards the Baltic Sea. The target was Peenemunde the Rocket experimental site. Our squadron was part of a force of Halifaxes, Lancasters and Stirlings dispatched to bomb the factories, living quarters and laboratories of the rocket site complex. Whenever Lancasters, Halifaxes and Stirlings operated together, the Lancasters would fly at 23,000 ft., the Halifaxes at 20,000 ft. and the Stirlings at 16,000 ft. The Stirling was compelled to fly at this altitude because of Air Ministry interference when it was first built. They ordered that 16 feet of the wings should be 'clipped' so that it would fit into the standard aircraft hanger. This had a

We arrived at Snaith as a crew and almost immediately we were put onto a flying training schedule to bring us up to squadron standard. This training consisted of an air test on the 15th of August where we tested all the systems of Halifax MH F-Freddie HR951 followed by a cross-country flight the same night and a third air test in MH L-Love JD263 on the 17th of August and that was it, we were ready for operations.

After the air test we looked at the Battle Orders for the squadron and the crew of Sgt. Bruce was on them. This was it. All the training and practice flying was all coming together and was to be tested on bombing operations. Before every operational sortie, crews were required to attend a 'Briefing'. This was a general talk by the C.O. and all the various section leaders, (gunnery, bombing etc.) and to get the 'Met' report and also the intelligence reports as to the disposition of enemy fighter and flak opposition. As we walked to the briefing room I felt a sense of curiosity and excitement but strangely hardly any fear. This feeling was to stay with me throughout my time with 51. We entered the briefing room and we sat down and faced a large curtain on the end wall. The CO entered and we all came

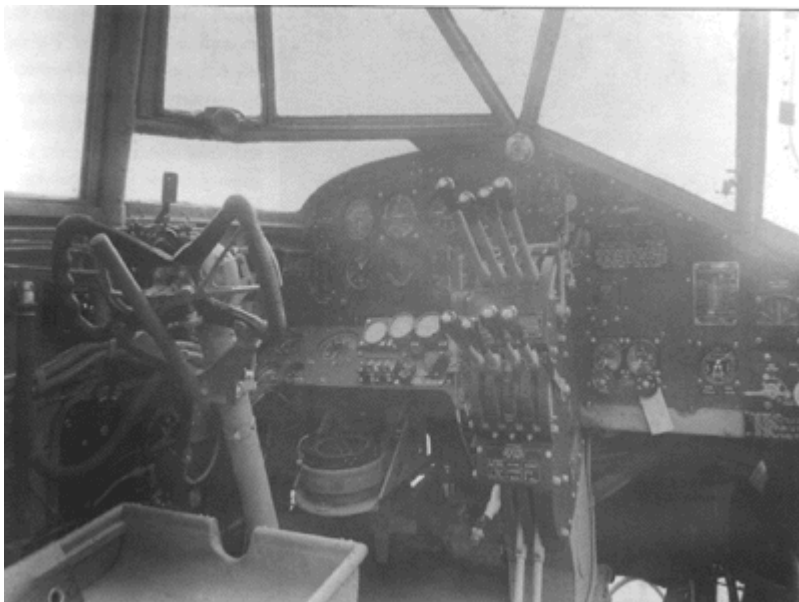
disastrous effect on its maximum altitude and as a result it flew below the other two bombers. The ever-sardonic aircrew of the Stirlings said the Lancaster bombed the Halifax and both bombed the Stirling. Very often very true and was considered just another operational hazard.



The Halifaxes and the Stirlings on the Peenemunde raid were to bomb the living quarters and the laboratories, while the Lancasters were to bomb the production sites. The intention was to kill as many people as possible, especially scientists who were connected with the design, production and assembling of the rockets. The intelligence officer caused a stir among the experienced crews when he announced the altitude for the bomb run would be 6,000 ft. That was damn low! The reason was to ensure complete destruction of the target. The bomb load for the raid was 1 x 4000 lb. 'Cookie', 9 x 1,000 lb. High Explosive (HE) and 2,000 lbs. of incendiaries in the wing bays. We left the briefing room and made our way to the locker rooms where we changed into our flying kit. The gunners of the crews could always be recognized as they wore the bulkiest flying clothing especially the rear gunners who were swathed in layers of different types of suits and gloves. The wireless operator had the warmest place in the aircraft as he was stationed next to the heaters. After dressing, we climbed aboard crew transport and headed for the dispersal where Halifax MH L-Love JD263 was standing. We were about to embark on operational sortie number 1. The first of a hoped for 30 ops a full tour, after which we would be stood down from operational flying for at least six months.

Prior to boarding the aircraft we all went through the ritual of urinating against the tail wheel of the aircraft, which was supposed to bring us good luck. The 'Brass' stopped this practice as the urine was causing corrosion to the tail unit. I would make a visual check of the exterior of the Hali, checking the tyres and control surfaces etc. We boarded L-Love and proceeded with our own personal pre-flight checks. Bill Bruce and I went through the cockpit checks. The engines would be started and run up for ten minutes while we both checked the systems and gauges. The engines were then shut down. We all disembarked while the petrol bowser came along side and topped up the bomber. The Mark of Halifax we were flying was a Mk II series 1A, which had 5 fuel tanks carrying a total of 1878 gallons of petrol. We then climbed back on board and did the final checks. We started the engines and taxied slowly to the take off point, all done in strict radio silence. A green Aldis lamp signal to the Skipper meant we could move into position on the end of the runway. By this time it was 21:15 hrs. We then received a further green light for take off. I opened the throttles with my hands on the lower part of the levers with Bill Bruce's hands on the higher part and we pushed them through the 'gate' I then put ASP lever in full fine pitch at 3,000 rpm plus 12 boost. The Halifax began its rumbling roar as it rolled forward. Holding the throttles wide open the aircraft thundered down the runway until take off speed was attained. Bill then lifted the bomb laden Halifax off the runway. We attained a climbing speed of 145 knots at 2650 plus 4 boost. We climbed to 14,000 ft by which time we were on oxygen. At that altitude I would engage the superchargers, which allowed the same power but with reduced revs. We climbed to our operational altitude of 22,000 ft and levelled out. We settled down to the prospect of flying over enemy territory and attacking a well-defended target for the first time. This very green and untried bomber crew was going to war.

To War!



We flew on and eventually began the run in to the target. I stood next to Bill and searched the starboard quarter for German fighters. As I looked in that area I spotted a Stirling some distance away but very visible. I told Bill and warned Ned in the Mid Upper to keep an eye on him and to tell us if it came any closer. Then quite suddenly the Stirling exploded with a blinding flash and disappeared in a shower of flames and burning debris. It was quite a shock for a green crew on its first op. We saw the Target Indicators (TI's) dropped by the Pathfinder Force (PFF) and so we went into the bombing run. I opened the bomb doors and Ray Slann in the nose called track corrections, left-right etc. to the Skipper. After what seemed an age we heard the longed for words 'Bombs Gone!' the Hali bucked as the weight left its belly. We flew straight and level for a few seconds to allow the photo flash to operate and take a picture of the target and then Bill banked the aircraft and we turned for home. I looked down at the target area and saw that it was a blazing inferno. After a quiet trip back (for us) we landed safely at Snaith at 05:15 hrs. after a flight lasting 8 hrs. After a debriefing where each member of the crew gave his view of the sortie, it was to the mess for bacon and eggs and then to

bed. We had survived operational sortie number one, twenty-nine to go. Many didn't survive that op. We were fortunate as we were in the first wave. By the time the second and third waves had arrived over the target, the German night fighters were there and took a heavy toll of the bombers. I would like to point out at this juncture that what was a successful operational sortie for us as a crew, was not necessarily a successful sortie from the viewpoint of Bomber Command.

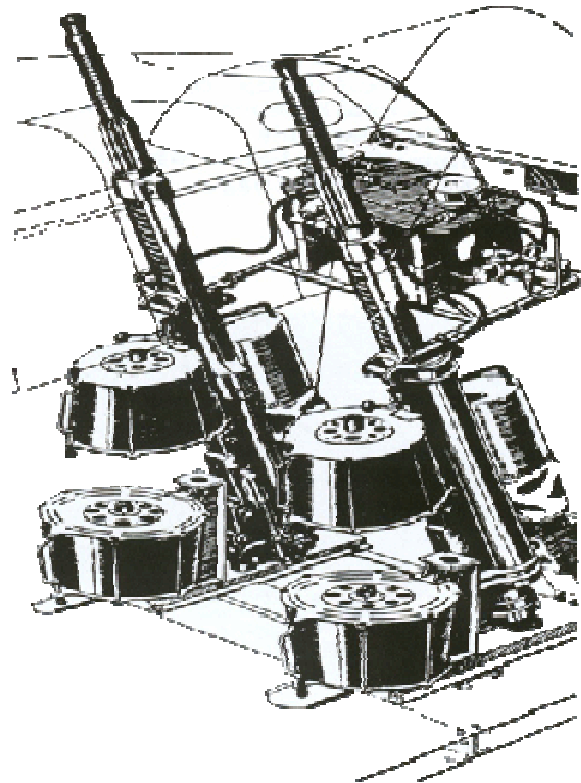
The Bomber Command War Diaries

Peenemunde 17/18 August 1943



596 aircraft - 324 Lancasters, 218 Halifaxes and 54 Stirlings. This was the first raid in which 6 (Canadian) Group operated Lancasters. 426 Squadron dispatched 9 Mark II Lancasters, losing 2 aircraft including that of the squadron commander. Wing Commander L. Crooks, D.S.O., D.F.C. an Englishman, was killed. This was a special raid which Bomber Command was ordered to carry out against the German research establishment on the Baltic coast where V-2 rockets were being built and tested. The raid was carried out in moonlight to increase the chances of success. There were several novel features. It was the only occasion in the second half of the war when the whole of Bomber Command attempted a precision raid by night on such a small target. For the first time there was a Master Bomber; Group Captain J.H. Searby, of 83 Squadron, 8 Group, carried out this task. There were three aiming points, the scientists' and workers' living quarters, the rocket factory and the experimental station. The Pathfinders employed a special plan with crews designated as 'Shifters', who attempted to move the markings from one part of the target to the next as the raid

progressed. The Pathfinders found Peenemunde without difficulty in the moonlight and the Master Bomber controlled the raid successfully throughout. 8 Mosquitoes carried out a successful diversion to Berlin with only one aircraft lost. This drew off most of the German night fighters for the first 2 of the raid's 3 phases. Unfortunately, the initial marking fell on a labour camp for forced workers which was situated 1½ miles south of the first aiming point, but the Master Bomber and the Pathfinders quickly brought the bombing back to the main targets, which were all bombed successfully. 560 aircraft dropped nearly 1,800 tons of bombs; 85% of this tonnage was high explosive. It has been estimated that this raid set back the V-2 experimental programme by at least two months and reduced the scale of the eventual rocket attack. Approximately 180 Germans were killed, nearly all in the workers' housing estate, and 500-600 foreigners, mostly Polish, were killed in the workers' camp where there were only flimsy wooden barracks and no proper air-raid shelters. Most of the casualties were suffered by the aircraft of the last wave when the German night fighters arrived in force; the groups involved were 5 Group, which lost 17 of its 109 aircraft and the Canadian 6 Group which lost 12 of its 57 aircraft.



This was the first night on which the Germans used their new Schräge Musik weapons. Schräge Musik is German for 'Slanted or Jazz music'. These were twin 20 mm upward firing cannons mounted against the rear bulkhead in the cockpit of the Messerschmitt Bf 110 night fighter. Two of these aircraft shot down six bombers from the third wave alone. The only time a bomber knew Schräge Musik was attacking was when the wing tanks caught fire or the engines were hit. This raid was considered a success despite the losses. **40 aircraft were lost—23 Lancasters, 15 Halifaxes, and 2 Stirlings**

On the 22nd of August we took charge of a new Halifax **MH K-King** HR-947 which was to be our 'personal' aircraft from then on, and we took her for an air test lasting 1 hr. 15 mins.

The next target was Leverkusen a suburb of Cologne. We carried the standard bomb load and took off at 21:10 hrs. We went into the bombing run, released the bombs and turned for home. We landed without incident apart from heavy flak at 03:30 hrs. after a trip lasting 5 hrs. 20 mins.

Leverkusen 22/23 August 1943

462 aircraft -257 Lancasters, 192 Halifaxes and 13 Mosquitoes. The I.G. Farben factory at Leverkusen was chosen as the aiming point on this raid. There was thick cloud over the target and there was a partial failure of Oboe the blind bombing aid. Bombs fell over a wide area and at least 12 other towns were hit. Dusseldorf was the hardest hit with 132 buildings destroyed and 644 seriously

damaged. In Solingen 40 people were killed and 65 injured. **5 aircraft were lost—3 Lancasters and 2 Halifaxes**

After a few hours of sleep we were called for ops for the following night. We went to the briefing and when the curtain was drawn there was more than the usual murmur from the crews, this time there was an audible groan. The target was Berlin or as the crews called it, 'The Big City' Of all the targets in Germany, Berlin caused the most consternation amongst the crews. It was as well defended if not more so than the Ruhr, but it was also the distance to be travelled and the psychology of the target itself, attacking the heart of Nazi Germany. The 'Big City' was the most dreaded of all targets for Bomber Command during the whole war.

We boarded **MH K-King** and carried out the usual checks and finally took off at 21:45 hrs. Everything seemed to be going well with the aircraft, but after about three hours into the flight, I discovered a malfunction with the 'Over-load tank' The Over-load tank was an extra fuel of 330 gallons which gave the Hali an extended range and Berlin was one of the more distant targets. The extra tank was fitted into the place of the 4,000 lb. 'Cookie' bomb. I was unable to transfer that fuel to the main wing tanks as the ground crew had failed to connect it properly. When I attempted to transfer the petrol it flowed into the bombay and made the whole aircraft smell of petrol fumes. There was no alternative but to return to Snaith. We landed at 04:15 hrs. where we handed the aircraft over to the ground crew.

Berlin 23/24 August 1943

727 aircraft-335 Lancasters, 251 Halifaxes, 124 Stirlings and 17 Mosquitoes. The Master Bomber on this raid was Wing Commander J. E. Fauquier of 405 Canadian Squadron. (He later commanded 617 Squadron) The pathfinders were unable to identify the centre of



the Golden Ball in York. One pub we took to was 'The Golden Ball' run by a Mrs. Craig. She was a friendly landlady and we often went there when we were off duty. The usual place was Blackamoor's Head in Pontefract for crews from Snaith. It was at the Blackamoor's Head where Ray Slann and Johnny Hepburn met their future wives. They got into conversation with two ATS girls, bought them a drink and from then on things developed.

Nose art became the thing in Bomber Command and we decided that we would give **MH K-King** a touch of it. We called our Halifax 'The Golden Knacker' after the Golden Ball pub and showed liquid bombs falling from a golden bottle. The CO told us we could not use that rude word. So we changed it to Kope-Inn.



pressure and fear that these young men were living under almost daily and although not condoning it, took a benevolent view and sentenced them accordingly.

It was about this time that I brought Joyce and baby Patricia over to live in rooms on a farm near the airfield. I once remember arriving back to find Joyce looking extremely worried because she couldn't find Patricia anywhere. We searched everywhere and I then became worried. It transpired that Sam Godfrey and Dick Hettersly who were on a different crew had taken the baby onto the airfield. We found them with Patricia sitting in the front of their Halifax looking out of the window. Although it was at first worrying, we saw the funny side and joined in the fun.

Berlin H2S and marked an area in the southern outskirts of the city. Much of the attack fell outside Berlin with 25 villages reporting bombs. Berlin reported 2,611 individual buildings were destroyed or seriously damaged. The worst damage was in the residential areas of Lankwitz and Lichterfelde and the worst industrial damage was in Mariendorf and Marienfelde which are well south of the city center. More industrial damage was caused in Tempelhof nearer the center and 20 ships on the city's canals were sunk. Casualties in Berlin were heavy considering the inaccurate bombing. 854 people were killed: 684 civilians, 60 service personnel, 6 air raid workers, 102 foreign workers (89 of them women) and 2 prisoners of war. 83 more civilians were classified as missing. This was Bomber Command's greatest loss of aircraft in one night so far in the war. **56 aircraft were lost-23 Halifaxes, 17 Lancasters and 16 Stirlings**

Life wasn't all flying and service tasks. Crews would often relax at the local pubs such as The Kings Head in the village of Pollington or

Due to the stresses and strains that bomber crews were under due to their almost nightly foray into the flack-ridden skies of Germany, a 'Live today for tomorrow we die' attitude developed among them. As a result more than a few got into scrapes with the police and local residents. Very rarely was it of a criminal nature in the true sense, it was more drunkenness and minor property damage. Sometimes whole crews would be arrested and taken into custody. To deal with this sort of problem there was a special unit or 'Cooler' in Sheffield where aircrew would be taken and given a few days to cool off to repent their sins. One crew commandeered a tram in Leeds and while the pilot sat in the drivers position, the bomb aimer went to the top deck and leaned out the window shouting 'Left-Left! Right-Right! Steady! Bombs Gone! They were duly hauled off to the cooler for a few days. The authorities soon realised the

On the 26th of August we took **MH K-King** for an air test but were stood down until the 27th. That night we were on ops and the target was **Nuremberg**, the scene of the Nazi rallies before the war. We took off at 21:15 hrs. and as we arrived over the target there was the usual dense flak and there were night fighters about, but none of them found us to our relief. We went into the bombing run Ray called out 'Bombs Gone' we banked after the photoflash and turned for home. The photoflash was used to take a photo of the target as the bombs dropped so that intelligence could assess the damage to the target. Cynics said it was for the Brass to make sure that the aeroplane was more or less where it should have been. We landed safely at 05:50 hrs. after a trip lasting 7 hrs. 50 mins.

Nuremberg 27/28 August 1943

674 aircraft-349 Lancasters, 221 Halifaxes and 104 Stirlings. The Marking for this raid was based on H2S readings. 47 of the Pathfinder aircraft were ordered to drop a 1,000 lb. bomb on Heilbron to check their equipment. Only 28 were able to carry out the order. Heilbron reported that several bombs dropped on the north of the town soon after midnight. Nuremberg was cloud free but it was very dark. The initial Pathfinder Markers were accurate but creep back quickly developed which could not be stopped as several Pathfinders had problems with their H2S sets. The Master Bomber could do little to persuade the Main Force forward as only a quarter of them could hear his broadcast. Bomber Command said that the bombs were scattered over a wide area. The local reports mention only the zoo, which was hit by several bombs. 64 people were killed. **39 aircraft were lost- 13 Halifaxes, 13 Lancasters and 13 Stirlings**

On the 30th of August we were called for a briefing for an op to **Monchengladbach**. We took off at 00:15 hrs. and headed out into the darkness. After about an hour Johnny the W/Op reported that there were sparks coming from the GEE (radar aid) apparatus. I went down the fuselage and switched the ground/flight switch to ground which isolated all the power and asked Johnny to disconnect the leads to the GEE box. I tied the leads back so that they were clear of contact and switched on the power. Without the GEE, the navigator had no means of navigation other than the compass and dead reckoning. We had no alternative but to return. We landed back at Snaith at 02:30 hrs. We reported the fault to the ground crew and made our report to de-brief and went to bed. That was our second force return, both down to unserviceability.

Monchengladbach/Rheydt 30/31 August 1943

660 aircraft-297 Lancasters, 185 Halifaxes, 107 Stirlings, 57 Wellingtons and 14 Mosquitoes. This was a double attack, with a 2 minute pause after the first phase while the Pathfinders transferred the marking from Monchengladbach to the neighbouring town of Rheydt. Approximately half of the built up area in each town was destroyed. Monchengladbach recorded 1,059 buildings destroyed-171 industrial, 19 military and 869 domestic, with 117 people killed. Rheydt recorded 1,280 buildings destroyed with damage to the main railway station and 253 people being killed. A further 2,152 people were injured and 12 were missing but these last figures are combined for the two towns. **25 aircraft were lost-8 Halifaxes, 7 Lancasters, 6 Stirlings and 4 Wellingtons**

We were back on ops the following night the 31st of August and the target was '**The Big City**' once again. We took off at 20:30 hrs. and after about three hours into the trip the aircraft developed serious instrument problems. Once again we had no alternative but to turn back. We decided that we would not waste our bombs, so we attacked a flak battery, which often gave crews a bad time. The battery was at a place called **Vlieland** in Holland. After the bombs fell away we headed back to Snaith and landed at 03:15hrs.

Berlin 31 August/1 September 1943

622 aircraft-331 Lancasters, 176 Halifaxes, 106 Stirlings and 9 Mosquitoes. Approximately two thirds of the bombers lost were shot down by German fighters operating over or near Berlin. The use of 'fighter flares' dropped by German aircraft to mark the bomber routes into and away from the target was used for the first time. Some cloud cover over Berlin with difficulties to the H2S equipment together with the ferocity of the German defences caused the Pathfinders to drop their markers well south of the centre. 85 dwelling houses were destroyed in Berlin but the only industrial buildings hit were classed as damaged-4 severely and 3 lightly. 66 civilians and 2 soldiers were killed. 109 people were injured and 2,784 bombed out. **47 aircraft were lost-20 Halifaxes, 17 Stirlings and 10 Lancasters**

Apart from operational flying and air testing aircraft we were required to carry out training in which the whole crew could participate and gain experience. One such training exercise was air to sea firing. A smoke float would be dropped into the sea and the Skipper would bring the aircraft down to 150-200 feet within range of the marker. The two gunners would then practice firing at it. This also allowed crew members to change positions to gain experience of other tasks. Ray would man a turret, Jack the navigator would take over as engineer, I would fly the aircraft and the Skipper would man a turret. This was a very useful type of training and had operational implications. These sort of training sorties were a change from the nerve wracking bombing raids.

The first op of September was what was known as a 'Gardening' sortie. Gardening was the slang for mine laying. We were briefed for a sortie to the **Kattergat** off the coast of Denmark and the load was 4 X 1,000 lb. mines. Mines had to be sown with precision, as the Royal Navy had to be aware of them if they sailed in that region. We followed exactly the co-ordinates for the sowing, ensuring our exact position and laid the mines. While we were doing our search I spotted the lights of a German airfield below, but thankfully there was no problem with fighters. There were many other aircraft that night laying mines in our area and in the Frisians. After a trip lasting 8 hrs. 10 mins. we landed safely back at Snaith.

Minor Operations 3/4 September 1943

While the Main Force of Bomber Command attacked Berlin on this night, 32 Wellingtons 6 Mosquitoes and 6 Halifaxes attacked an ammunition dump in the Forêt de Raismes near Valenciennes. 44 Stirlings and 12 Halifaxes laid mines off Denmark and Frisians and the Biscay coast. 4 Mosquitoes attacked Dusseldorf and 7 O.T.U. Whitleys dropped leaflets. **3 aircraft were lost-1 Wellington, 1 Stirling and 1 Whitley**

The next night 5th of September we were on ops and it was back to the German heartland, to the city of **Mannheim**, another heavily defended target. That night we had a straightforward trip and after bombing the target we turned for home and landed safely after a trip lasting 8 hrs. 10 mins.

Mannheim/Ludwigshafen 5/6 September 1943

605 aircraft-299 Lancasters, 195 Halifaxes and 111 Stirlings. The target area for this double attack was clear of cloud and the Pathfinder marking worked perfectly. Ground markers were placed on the eastern side of Mannheim so that the Main Force could pass over that city and move onto Ludwigshafen on the West Bank of the Rhine. Creep back was minimal and there was severe destruction of both targets. Mannheim's normal reporting was disrupted by this extreme bombing raid and does not give specific details. The record speaks only of 'a catastrophe' and tells of the behaviour of the air raid services. There was more detail from Ludwigshafen where the central and southern parts of the town were devastated. The fire department recorded 1,193 separate fires including three classed as fire areas. 139 industrial fires were started, 1,080 houses were destroyed, 6 military and 4 industrial buildings were wrecked including the I.G. Farben works. 127 people were killed and 568 were injured, 10 of which were flak troops. A further 1,605 people were described as suffering from eye injuries. The relatively low number of death reflected that German cities were being evacuated since the firestorm at Hamburg and other heavy raids. **34 aircraft were lost-13 Lancasters, 13 Halifaxes and 8 Stirlings**

On the 6th of September we were briefed for another op, this time to **Munich**, one of the most easterly targets for Bomber Command. There was the standard bomb load of 1 X 4,000 lb. 'Cookie' 9 X 1,000 lb. GP in the main bomb bay and 2,000 lbs. of incendiaries in the wing bays. A quite trip with the usual heavy flak and searchlights. We went into the bombing run, Ray called 'Bombs Gone' and we banked for home. As we approached England one of the crew (I can't remember which one) called out 'The port inner engine is trailing smoke' I monitored the engine until we got over the English countryside and then the Skipper suggested that we land at the nearest airfield, which was Benson in Oxfordshire. We landed without incident and taxied into dispersal. The ground crew decided that a new engine was required and made moves to have one delivered from about 30 miles away, which meant ordering a crane to lift it into position. Apart from the seven-crew members in a Halifax, there were also 2 carrier pigeons taken on each trip. If the aircraft was lost or went down in the sea, the flight engineer would write a message and attach it to the bird's leg and then the home base would know what the situation was. After we had landed at Benson I attached a note to a pigeon's leg and released it. It did one circuit of the airfield and then flew north. I took the other pigeon out and released it and it did the same thing. Within a couple of hours Snaith knew of our diversion to Benson. The following day we flew back to Snaith with a brand new port inner engine. It was another six days before we got MH K-King back. On the 14th she was handed back to us and we took her up for a 30-minute flight test.

Munich 6/7 September 1943

404 aircraft-257 Lancasters and 147 Halifaxes. Munich was mostly cloud covered and neither their ground-markers nor their sky-markers were effective. Most of the crews do no more than bomb on a timed run from Lake Ammersee some 21 miles south west of the target. The bombing was scattered over the south west of the city. There are no reports available from Munich. **16 aircraft were lost-13 Halifaxes and 3 Lancasters**

On the 15th we were called for an op against a target in France, **Montlucon**. Montlucon was where the Dunlop Tyre factory was situated in central France and was the main tyre supplier for the German army. We carried a large number of incendiaries this night to ensure ignition of the tyres. We went into the bombing run and as we pulled out I looked down and saw a thick pall of smoke drifting up from the target. We came a little lower and opened a window and some of the smoke seeped into the aircraft. We felt as if we had achieved something that night. We arrived safely back at Snaith after a trip lasting 6 hrs. 55 mins.

Montlucon 15/16 September 1943

369 aircraft-from 3, 4, 6 and 8 Groups-209 Halifaxes, 120 Stirlings, 40 Lancasters and 5 American B17 Fortresses. This was a moonlit raid on the Dunlop rubber factory at Montlucon in Central France. The Pathfinders marked the target accurately and the Master Bomber, Wing Commander D. F. E. C. Deane, brought the Main Force in well to carry out some very accurate bombing. Every building in the factory was hit and a large fire was started. This was the last time that the Master Bomber technique was used until the spring of 1944. **3 aircraft were lost-2 Halifaxes and 1 Stirling**

There was hardly time for rest before we were called for another op, this time to railway marshalling yards at **Modane**, which formed a tunnel between France and Italy. Through the tunnel ran the main supply route to the German army in Italy. The Halifaxes and Stirlings attacked the French side of the tunnel and the Lancasters the Italian side. There was very light flak and we returned without incident after a trip lasting 8 hrs. 10 mins.

Modane 16/17 September 1943

340 aircraft-170 Halifaxes, 127 Stirlings, 43 Lancasters and 5 American B17's. The target was the important railway yards at Modane on the main route to Italy to France. The Marking of the target situated in a steep valley was not successful and the bombing was not accurate. There were no reports available from France. **3 aircraft were lost-2 Halifaxes and 1 Stirling**

One interesting aspect of ongoing training was the fighter affiliation exercises. This exercise was when the Halifax would rendezvous with a fighter to interpret the angle of attack by a fighter on the bomber. This was chiefly for the benefit of the two gunners and the pilot for them to practice the 'Cork-Screw' manoeuvre. The corkscrew was a manoeuvre designed for bomber to break free from a determined fighter attack. The gunner(s) would report that a fighter was coming in for an attack from a certain quarter of the aircraft e.g. Starboard beam etc. giving the clock position of the attack, and the order to corkscrew would be given to the skipper. The Skipper would turn the aircraft into the attack and at the same time dive and lose height. This would cause the attacking fighter to overshoot the turning diving bomber, this combined with the separation speed of the two a/c, contact was sometimes lost and the bomber would carry on with normal flying. Constant vigilance was the key for all crewmembers. While the corkscrew was being carried out all the other members of the crew simply hung on until level flight was resumed. Many a bomber was saved by this vital manoeuvre.



On the 22nd of September we were briefed for a raid on the city of **Hanover** in north East Germany. On this trip we had a different bomb aimer as Ray was on the sick list. Our replacement was Sgt. Tom McCarthy. We took off for Hanover but an hour into the trip the Hali developed icing in the air carburettor intakes, so once again we had to return. On the route back Tom suggested we should bomb a flak position on the Island of Texel off the coast of Holland. (This was so we didn't waste the bombs) The trip lasted 3 hrs. 35 mins.

Hanover 22/23 September 1943

716 aircraft-322 Lancasters, 226 Halifaxes, 137 Stirlings, 26 Wellingtons and 5 American B17's. This was the first time the USAF had attacked Germany at night. Visibility in the target area was good but stronger winds than forecast caused marking and the bombing to be concentrated between 2 and 5 miles south-south east of the city centre. There was no German report but little damage was caused. **26 aircraft were lost-12 Halifaxes, 7 Lancasters, 5 Stirlings and 2 Wellingtons**

There was no respite in the bombing offensive and the next night we were back over **Hanover** once again. It was another straight forward trip. After going into the bombing run and turning away we headed for home. After a short time, Johnny received a message saying that the weather was so bad in Yorkshire that we had to divert to Bury St. Edmonds. Bury St. Edmonds was an American base in Cambridge which the Yanks called Edwards Air Force base. When we landed we noticed several Lancasters and Halifaxes dotted all around the airfield. So the weather had been bad in Lincolnshire too. We were all billeted in the gymnasium and all we had with us was our flying gear. We settled down for the night, but when I awoke the next morning I found that my flying boots had disappeared. So I had to walk to the Sgt. Mess in my stocking feet, which got very soggy walking in the rain. I made enquires and they announced around the station for who ever had taken the boots to return them. When the bloke came who had taken the boots, he offered me a hundred dollars for them. I explained that I couldn't sell them, so he said 'Just buy another pair from the PX.' I then had to explain we didn't have such a thing and that everything was on a loan card. He reluctantly handed them back. The weather cleared and we flew back to Snaith.

Hanover 27/28 September 1943

683 aircraft-312 Lancasters, 231 Halifaxes, 111 Stirlings, 24 Wellingtons and 5 B17's. Faulty wind forecasts again saved the centre of Hanover. The bombing was very concentrated but fell on an area 5 miles north of the city centre. No details are available from Germany but R.A.F. photo evidence showed that most of the bombs fell in open country or villages north of the city. **38 aircraft were lost-17 Halifaxes, 10 Lancasters, 10 Stirlings, 1 Wellington and 1 B17**

The weather prevented operational flying for a few days, but on the 29th it cleared and we were back on ops. The target was the town of **Bochum** in the Ruhr or '**Happy Valley**' as it was called by the aircrews. The Ruhr was the industrial heart of Germany and was a regular target for Bomber Command. The Ruhr belt of flak guns and searchlights were notorious for shooting down scores of bombers and crews earlier in the year during the Battle of the Ruhr. The German defences had what was called a Master Blue searchlight, which locked onto a bomber and stayed locked until about a dozen or more other searchlights coned the unfortunate aircraft. Then all available flak guns would open up and almost always that was the end of the bomber. Bombers would cork-screw and twist and spiral before exploding into flames or diving out of control. Some were lucky and got away with it but for most it was a death dive. We were once coned, but we dove straight down the beam and it worked, we flew clear. The Battle of the Ruhr was a series of raids carried out to smash the German industrial complex in that region. It was successful but not as successful as expected. For us it was a straight run in, but that night we witnessed a phenomenon, which caused great concern among bomber crews. As we approached the target we could see bombers apparently going down in flames all around us. Jack the navigator plotted each one in the Log as we reported them to him. Bombers going down in flames were nothing new, but the rate it was happening seemed odd. After we got back and went to the debrief, we were told that the Germans were sending up spoof flares which exploded amongst the bomber stream, which made it look like a

burning bomber. It was supposed to frighten and deter the 'Green Crews'. You didn't have to be a Green Crew to feel fear! They were nicknamed 'Scarecrows' by the crews. We never ever encountered them again.

Bochum 29/30 September 1943

352 aircraft-213 Lancasters, 130 Halifaxes and 9 Mosquitoes. The Oboe assisted Pathfinder plan worked perfectly and led to accurate and concentrated bombing. In the Bochum air-raid-area-which included three small towns near by-527 houses were destroyed and 742 seriously damaged. The Altstadt was severely damaged. 161 people were killed including 33 foreign workers and POW's and 337 people were injured. **9 aircraft were lost-5 Halifaxes and 4 Lancasters**



One ruse I had devised and would use when we were returning from an op (When we were clear of possible enemy interference and usually approaching England) was to get all the fuel checks and balance right and then sit at my station and open a tin of orange juice. I would open the tin with a knife kept in my flying boots. (The knife was used to cut off the tops of the boots, which made them look like shoes so as not to be given away) I would open the juice and light a cigarette, slowly inhale and drink the juice right in full view of Johnny Hepburn the W/Op, much to his annoyance. Also issued to the crew was a tin of barley sugars. As there didn't seem to be enough to make a worthwhile share amongst the crew, we would do the sharing on a rota basis. So every seventh trip I would get a tin of barley sugars. They were quite a luxury.

A couple of amusing stories emerged about this time. The first concerned an American 8th Air Force B24 Liberator crew who had newly arrived in England. They came over and the next day they went on a training cross-country navigation trip and became lost. They flew across to the continent and ended up in Czechoslovakia. So within three days of arriving in Britain, they were POW's. The other story was about a Lancaster crew who had been shot up and were flying back across the Channel Isles where they were fired on by German flak. The members of the crew who usually helped the aircraft get to and from, the Engineer, Navigator and the Wireless Operator all baled out, leaving the poor pilot with just 2 gunners Pope and Saunders and the bomb aimer. They tried their best and gauged that they had enough fuel for several hours of flying so they set toward England for twenty minutes but missed the mainland. They turned back and landed on one of the airfields 'owned' by the Germans. So they were in 'The Bag' also.

On the 3rd of October we were detailed for another op and this time it was to **Kassel** another heavily defended target in Germany. We took off at 18:20 hrs. and although there was the usual dense flak we went into the bombing run and bombed the target and got out pretty quickly. We landed at Snaith at 02:10 hrs. after a round trip lasting 7 hrs. 50 mins.

Kassel 3/4 October 1943

547 aircraft-233 Halifaxes, 204 Lancasters, 113 Stirlings and 7 Mosquitoes. This raid did not proceed according to plan. The H2S 'blind marker' aircraft overshot the aiming point badly and the 'visual markers' not correct this because their view of the ground was restricted by thick haze. German decoy markers may have also been present. The main weight of the attack fell on the western suburbs and outlying towns and villages. Despite this, large fires were started at both Henschel and Fieseler aircraft factories and at the city's main hospital and several other important buildings. The eastern suburb of Wolfshanger was devastated. Kassel's casualties were 118 dead-68 civilians, 12 military and 38 foreigners with 304 injured. A chance bomb load hit a large ammunition dump in Ihringshausen north of Wolfshanger and the resulting explosion attracted further bombs. Photographs later showed 84 buildings at the military location had been destroyed. The outlying townships of Bettenhausen and Sanderhausen were also severely hit. **24 aircraft were lost-14 Halifaxes, 6 Stirlings and 4 Lancasters**

Part of our training was the art of escape and evasion. It was very basic instructions, but was vital if ever we were shot down. Intelligence supplied all aircrew with escape aids, which usually consisted of miniature compasses in different shapes and sizes. I was issued with one that fitted into a button on the epaulette of my battle dress tunic. Instead of the usual Bakelite buttons, I had two brass ones fitted with a compass hidden in one. When the compass was opened (opposite thread) it would give a bearing due north so the escapee could find his own bearings. Other compasses were hid in pipes, which could be smoked in the ordinary way, but when the bowl was screwed off the compass was revealed. I always flew with my brass button compass.

On the 4th of October it was back to work. The target was **Frankfurt** near the Swiss border. We took off with the standard bomb load at 17:30 hrs. It will be noted that we were taking off much earlier as the nights were longer as it was now almost winter. We went into the

bombing run and then I saw a Junkers 88 night fighter some 450 yards to our starboard beam. I informed the Skipper and Ned in his mid upper turret. Ned traversed his turret and asked if he should open fire. The Skipper said no, but told him to keep an eye on him. In general, bomber crews tried to avoid combat with German fighters, as it was well known it was an unequal contest. The range of the German fighter's cannon was far greater than our tiny .303 Brownings. So they could begin their attack a lot sooner than we could reply. A most disconcerting feeling especially for the two gunners. The principle was only to fire when attacked, otherwise, it was keep your head down! We assumed Ju 88 had run out of ammunition and if we had fired at him, he may have been fanatical enough to ram us. We carried on with the bombing run, bombed then got out of it. We never saw the fighter any more. We landed safely at 02:15 hrs. after a trip lasting 7 hrs. 55 mins.

Frankfurt 4/5 October 1943

409 aircraft-162 Lancasters, 170 Halifaxes, 70 Stirlings, 4 Mosquitoes and 3 B17's. This was the last R.A.F. night-bombing raid in which American aircraft took part, but individual B17's occasionally carried out bombing flights in following weeks. Clear weather and good Pathfinder marking produced the first serious blow to Frankfurt so far in the war, with extensive destruction being caused in the eastern half of the city and in the inland docks on the River Main. Both these areas are described in the Frankfurt report as having been a 'sea of flames'. Many city centre type buildings are also mentioned as being hit. The new Rathaus had its roof burnt out. No overall figures are given for casualties, the only mention being a tragedy at an orphanage housed in the former Jewish hospital, where a bomb scored a direct hit on the basement shelter killing 90 children, 14 nuns and other members of the staff. In the following days, the main railway station was packed with people trying to leave Frankfurt. **10 aircraft were lost-5 Halifaxes, 3 Lancasters and 2 Stirlings**

On the 3rd of November we were detailed for a raid on **Dusseldorf** in 'Happy Valley' the Ruhr. There were always groans from the crews whenever the Ruhr was revealed as the target, but there was no backing off. Not only were the towns and cities in the Ruhr heavily defended but the flak and defences from towns close by were also turned on attacking bombers, there was no dodging it. Once again our luck held as we went into the bombing run, bombed and turned away. After 4 hrs. 50 mins. in the air we landed safely at Snaith.

Dusseldorf 3/4 November 1943

589 aircraft-344 Lancasters, 233 Halifaxes and 12 Mosquitoes. The main weight of the raid fell in the centre and south of the city but it is difficult to obtain precise results of the outcome. Like some other German cities, Dusseldorf's records start to show deterioration under the pressure of the severe raids of 1943. There was certainly extensive damage both to housing and to industrial premises but a detailed resume is not possible. The same problem exists with casualties. An early local report says that 23 people died but this appears to have been altered to 118 at a later date. The United States Bombing Survey gives a figure of 622 dead and 942 injured for the whole month of November. There were no more attacks on Dusseldorf that month. **18 aircraft were lost-11 Lancasters and 7 Halifaxes**

Whenever aircraft were returning from an op, the damaged aircraft were given priority to land, as were those short of fuel. I worked out a ruse by where I would report that we were short of fuel and request a priority landing. It worked a couple of times, but the third time I was rumbled. After we landed, I was called up to the wing commander and told that the next time we tried it, we would stay up there until we ran out of fuel and THEN we would be allowed to come down. I was the one responsible for organising the fuel loads and for keeping the pilot informed, so I got it in the neck. I never tried that one again.

We were once diverted to **Middle Wallop** an airfield in the West Country. We had to wait a while for our aircraft to be made serviceable so we decided to go for a pint at the local pub. The problem was, we didn't have any headgear and hats had to be worn outside the camp. We went to the fitters and asked if we could borrow their hats. One of them said there was no need to bother and showed us a hole in the fence, which opened like a gate. We went through the hole and immediately were confronted by a gaggle of geese, which came for us. We made a run for it, then I stopped among the geese and shouted, "Look at these brave airmen! Running away!" We had just come back from a bombing raid and here we were, scared of a few geese??

On the 6th of November we carried out an air test lasting 1 hr. 10 mins. While we were airborne near the London area we received a message that there were two FW 190 operating in the area. Not too long after the message, a blunt nosed fighter appeared on our starboard wing. Ned traversed his turret and lined up the fighter. When we had a good look, we saw a black face and a row of shiny teeth looking directly at us. It was an American Thunderbolt with a black pilot grinning at us. After the initial surprise we saw the funny side of it.

On the 10th of November we did an air-sea firing exercise and then on the 11th (Armistice Day) we were back on ops. This time we were off to the South of France to attack the marshalling yards at **Cannes**. This was a tunnel link for the Italian front. We took off with 4 X 1,000 lb. GP and 180 4 lb. Incendiary bombs. We bombed from 14,000 feet without any problem, as the area seemed to be lightly defended. We had to land at Middle Wallop due to running short of fuel. After refuelling we took off and landed safely at Snaith after round trip of 8 hrs. 40 mins.

Cannes 11/12 November 1943

134 aircraft-124 Halifaxes and 10 Lancasters of 4, 6 and 8 Groups to bomb the marshalling yards and railway installations on the main coastal line to Italy. The night was clear and the Pathfinders marked the target from 5,000 ft. but the railway yards were not hit at all and the railway workshops suffered only blast damage. A report from Cannes states that the local people were at first thrilled to see the

‘firework display’ of the Pathfinders and could even see the R.A.F. aircraft in the moonlight, but the bombing, ‘like a typhoon’, mainly fell in the working-class suburb of La Bocca, where 39 people were killed, and in the village of d’Agay, where the casualties were not recorded. A local newspaper, under German control, writes of the resentment of the local French people at the inaccurate bombing, particularly as the British had been such popular pre-war visitors to Cannes. The British were, writes the newspaper, ‘pure savages’ and the raid was ‘nothing but murder for British glory...too much like sport’. **4 Halifaxes were lost**

On the 15th of November we carried out an air-sea firing test for 55 minutes and then were stood down for a four days. On the 19th it was ops to **Leverkusen** near Cologne. Our Skipper on this trip was Pilot Officer Bruce. Our Skipper had been commissioned and this was his first op with his new rank. Once more our luck held. We bombed the target and returned safely after a trip lasting 6 hrs. 55 mins.

Leverkusen 19/20 November 1943

266 aircraft-170 Halifaxes, 86 Stirlings and 10 Mosquitoes of 3,4, 6 and 8 Groups. Very few German fighters were operating, probably because of bad weather at their airfields. Failures of equipment prevented most of the Oboe marking being carried out and other Pathfinder aircraft were unable to mark the target properly in difficult weather conditions, leading to bombs being scattered over a wide area. At least 27 towns, mostly well to the north of Leverkusen, recorded bombs. Leverkusen’s own records show only one high-explosive bomb in the town! **5 aircraft were lost-4 Halifaxes and 1 Stirling**

By this time the Battle of Berlin was underway and it wouldn’t be long before we would be briefed for an op there. I would like to give a short résumé of the Battle of Berlin.

Berlin-The Main Battle

The Battle of Berlin began on the 18/19th of November 1943 and in the words of the Commander in Chief of Bomber Command Air Marshal ‘Butch’ Harris “Bomber Command will wreck Berlin from end to end” It was reasoned that hitting the German capital in a long sustained bombing campaign would hasten the war’s end by convincing the German people of the futility of the war. This reasoning was also used for the whole of the Bomber Offensive, but hitting their capital was the crux of the campaign. For the crews of the ‘Command’ Berlin was the most daunting of targets. Other targets were as well defended as ‘The Big City’, especially the targets in the Ruhr valley, but Berlin was the one that caused the most consternation. This phase of the bomber offensive was to last until the middle of February 1944. Although there was to be one more raid by the heavy formations in March, from that time the Mosquito was to take over the role as the Berlin Bomber. The Germans defended their capital with great courage, skill and tenacity, a tenacity that was to stretch the courage and endurance of the bomber crews to their uttermost limits. So on the 18th of November 1943 one of the most severe and bitter air battles of the Second World War was about to be joined.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris was given the nick-name 'Butch' by the crews for what he did to bomber crews and not to what he inflicted on the German population. Despite the awful losses suffered by the command, the crews held ‘Butch’ in high regard.

On the 22nd of November that call for **Berlin** came. For us it was a non-event. Within an hour of taking off we had to return due to problems with the aircraft. Problems which I cannot recall. I learned later that our Squadron had lost two aircraft that night. Sam Godfrey my long time friend since our flight engineer training days was on one of them. It was a sad night for me, but one had to just get on with it. I found out later that he didn’t even have a known grave, as his body was never traced. Sam Godfrey is remembered on the Runnymede Memorial to the missing.

Berlin 22/23 November 1943

764 aircraft-469 Lancasters, 234 Halifaxes, 50 Stirlings and 11 Mosquitoes. This was the greatest force sent to Berlin so far but it was also the last raid in which Stirlings were sent to Germany. Bad weather again kept most of the German fighters on the ground and the bomber force was able to take a relatively 'straight in, straight out' route to the target without suffering undue loss. Berlin was again completely cloud-covered and returning crews could only estimate that the marking and bombing were believed to be accurate. In fact, this was the most effective raid on Berlin of the war. A vast area of destruction stretched from the central districts westward across the mainly residential areas of Tiergarten and Charlottenburg to the separate suburb city of Spandau. Because of the dry weather conditions, several 'firestorm' areas were reported and a German plane next day measured the height of the smoke cloud as 19,000 ft. It is difficult to give exact casualty figures. An estimated 2,000 people were killed, including 500 in a large shelter in Wilmersdorf which recieved a direct hit, and 105 people were killed in another shelter which was next to the Neukoln gasworks, where there was a huge explosion. **26 aircraft were lost-11 Lancasters, 10 Halifaxes and 5 Stirlings**

On the 26th we were on ops to the city of **Stuttgart** another well-defended target. We had a different pilot that night a Flt/Lt Lovelace. I think Bill Bruce was sick and Tony Lovelace’s aircraft was u/s. The raid on Stuttgart was a split raid. The force going to Berlin and the smaller force to Stuttgart. We rendezvoused with the Main Force and then flew onto the Ruhr. The Main Force then headed for the German capital and we turned for Stuttgart. We encountered a few night fighters and the usual flak but returned safely after a trip lasting 8 hrs. 10 mins.

Stuttgart 26/27 November 1943

178 aircraft-157 Halifaxes and 21 Lancasters. The Berlin force and the Stuttgart diversionary force flew a common route over Northern France and on nearly to Frankfurt before diverging, while 443 Lancasters and 7 Mosquitoes attacked Berlin. The German controllers thought that Frankfurt was the main target until a late stage and several bombers were shot down as they flew past Frankfurt. Only a few fighters appeared over Berlin, where flak was the main danger, but the scattered condition of the bomber stream at Berlin meant that bombers were caught off track by fighters on the return flight and the casualties mounted. 28 Lancasters were lost and 14 more crashed in England. The diversion to Stuttgart succeeded in drawing off the fighters but the bombing was scattered. **6 Halifaxes were lost**

After the Stuttgart raid all of our crew went on leave and returned on the 10th of December. By that time all the Mk1A and Mk 11 Halifaxes had gone and the squadron was converting to the Mk 111. We spent nine days converting to the Mk 111. We carried out air tests carrying dummy bomb loads.

It was back to ops on the 20th of December and the target was **Frankfurt**. We took off at 17:02 hrs. and headed for Germany. The flak was intense over the Dutch coast and fighters were around, but none found us thank goodness. We attacked the target from 18,400 ft. at 17:42 hrs. The Green Markers dropped by the Pathfinders were widely dispersed. We saw a huge red glow over the target as we turned for home. We returned safely at 22:56 hrs.

Frankfurt 20/21 December 1943

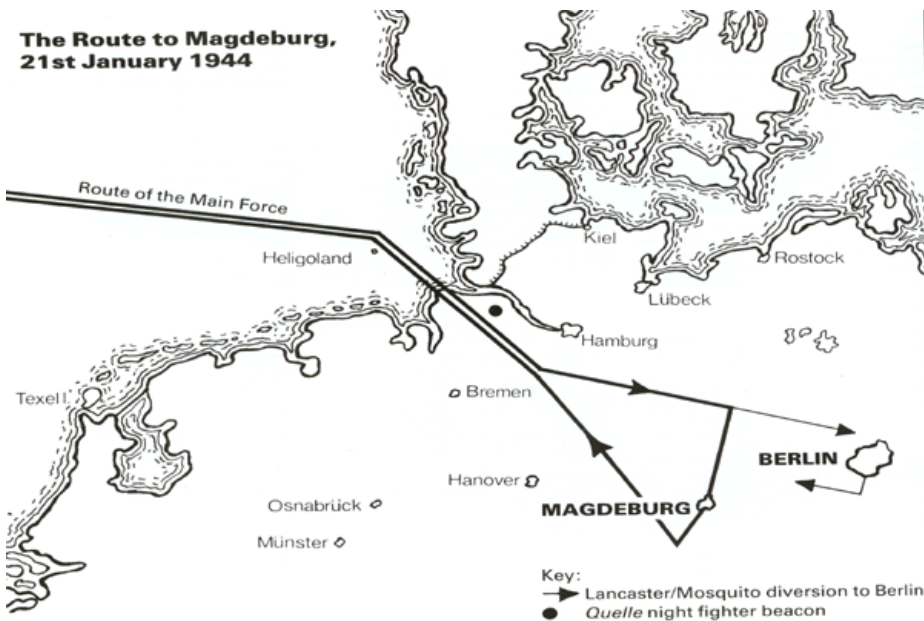
650 aircraft-390 Lancasters, 257 Halifaxes and 3 Mosquitoes. The German control rooms were able to plot the bomber force as soon as it left the English coast and were able to continue plotting all the way to Frankfurt. There were many combats on the route to the target. The Mannheim diversion did not draw fighters away from the main attack until after the raid was over but the return flight was quieter. The bombing at Frankfurt did not go according to plan. The Pathfinders had prepared a ground-marking plan on the basis of a forecast giving clear weather but they found up to 8/10ths cloud. The Germans lit a decoy fire site 5 miles south-east of the city and also used dummy target indicators. Some of the bombing fell around the decoy but part of the creep back fell on Frankfurt causing more damage than Bomber Command realised at the time. 466 houses were completely destroyed and 1,948 seriously damaged in Frankfurt and in the outlying townships of Sachsenhausen and Offenbach. 117 bombers hit various industrial premises but no important factories are mentioned. The report stresses the large number of cultural, historical and public buildings hit including the cathedral, the city library the city hospital and no fewer than 69 schools. The Wehrmacht suffered damage to 4 flak positions, a clothing store, a veterinary depot and the Army Music School. 64 people were killed and 111 were missing or still covered by wreckage. 23,000 people were bombed out. A train standing 6 miles south of Frankfurt was hit by a 4,000 lb. bomb and 13 people in it were killed. Part of the bombing somehow fell on Mainz, 17 miles to the west, and many houses along the Rhine waterfront and in southern suburbs were hit. 14 people were killed. **41 aircraft were lost-27 Halifaxes and 14 Lancasters**

For some time I had been thinking about trying to get my brother Eric transferred into the RAF. This was allowable under the current regulations where an elder brother could claim a younger brother. I approached the Wing Commander and asked if it were possible. The Wing Commander made enquiries and later informed me that if my brother were to transfer to the RAF he would be expected to apply for aircrew training. That finished the application. My mother could not have faced having two sons in Bomber Command and so Eric stayed in the army.

The New Year arrived, it was 1944. We were detailed for another raid on the 'Big City' on the 20th of January. We took off at 16:41 hrs. with a bomb load of 2 x 1,000 lb. GP, 2 x 500 lb. cluster bombs, 24 x 30lb. incendiaries and 450 lb. incendiaries. The bomb load showed that Berlin was to be blasted and burned. A couple of hours into the sortie we had to turn back. The Berlin jinx had struck once again. The overload tank was leaking and the oxygen supply to the gunners was faulty. We jettisoned the bombs and landed back at Snaith at 18:21 hrs. This was our third attempt at Berlin and still we hadn't got there, the Gremlins had been at work once again. The ground crew fixed the overload tank and the oxygen supply for the gunners and it was back to Germany the following night.

The target was **Magdeburg** a city south west of Berlin.

648 aircraft-421 Lancasters, 224 Halifaxes and 3 Mosquitoes-on the first major raid to this target. The German controller again followed the progress of the bomber stream across the North Sea and many night fighters were in the stream before it crossed the German coast. The controller was very slow to identify Magdeburg as the target but this did not matter too much because most the night fighters were able to stay in the bomber stream, a good example of the way the Tame Boar tactics were developing. The heavy bomber casualties were not rewarded with a successful attack. Some of the Main Force aircraft now had H2S and winds which were stronger than forecast



brought some of these into the target area before the Pathfinder's Zero Hour. The crews of 27 Main Force aircraft were anxious to bomb and did so before Zero hour. The Pathfinders blamed the fires started by this early bombing, together with some very effective German decoy markers, for their failure to concentrate the marking. No details are available from Magdeburg but it is believed that most of the bombing fell outside the city. An R.A.F. man who was in hospital at Magdeburg at the time reports only, 'bangs far away'. It is probable that three quarters of the losses were caused by German night fighters. **57 aircraft were lost-35 Halifaxes and 22 Lancasters**

Note: 'Tame Boar' were fighters under the control of a ground officer directing them to a specific target. 'Wild Boar' were fighters who roamed freely seeking out targets.

It will be noted that the reports of each raid and the losses are recorded in percentage losses. The percent

of loss of a bombing force is a vital factor in the continuation of the offensive. If losses continue at a 5%-7% loss rate, then the losses are outstripping the replacements, both in aircraft and crews. **(It must never be forgotten that each time a bomber went down, seven men went down with it)** Bomber Command came very close to that critical level many times during the bomber offensive, 1943-1944.

Nemesis for...L-Love

For some reason, which I cannot recall, we were not to fly K-King this night but **MH L-Love** LV779 instead. It must have been a major unserviceability on K-King. After the standard briefing we carried out our standard checks and tests, sat around for the last cigarette, climbed on board and taxied out to the holding point. We received our green 'Go' signal. I opened the throttles we thundered down the runway, cleared the hedgerow and climbed into the winter night sky. We met up with the Main Force and flew northwards over Hornsea and across the North Sea then turned east and flew toward the Baltic. We then turned and skirted around Berlin and headed south to Magdeburg. Everything was going as planned and we went into the bombing run. I had just selected bomb doors open when we were hit by a burst of cannon and machine-gun fire!!

The attack came from a Me 110 night fighter. The fighter attacked from the rear starboard quarter. The shells shot away half the starboard fin and rudder. They then travelled through the fuselage destroying my accumulator. This had the effect of stopping the bomb doors from opening fully, in fact they were open half way and stuck there. The shells then ripped into the two port engines knocking them out along with the elevators on that wing. This immediately gave me two red warning lights on my panel. I went into the fuselage and put two full tanks onto the engines. The red warning lights remained, so I changed the tanks again and the lights remained on. The only alternative was to shut down the main gallery lines. I then feathered the two damaged engines. The bomb doors were still only half open so I returned to the fuselage and began operating the emergency pump, which opens the bomb doors fully. The idea was for us to drop the bombs if we could. Hydraulic fluid was by now washing around my feet, which made walking very difficult. At this moment Johnny the W/Op beckoned me to come to his station. I plugged in my inter-com and he told me that the Skipper was stamping on the floor section above my head trying to attract my attention. He said the starboard inner engine was u/s as well. I moved the two power levers for both the starboard engines, but only the outer responded. The inner engine was windmilling, but I couldn't work out why there wasn't a red light, as the fuel seemed to be getting through. At this point the Hali had begun a slow descending turn and the altimeter showed we were losing about 2,000 ft. per minute. The Skipper was trying to keep it in level flight but the bomber would not respond and continued in its slow spiral. He said, "Well, what do we do now?" Our altitude was now about 22,000 ft. with a full bomb load and the bomb doors half open. I said there was no chance of getting back to England with just one serviceable engine and the only thing was to bale out. Bill ordered the other five to bale out and I watched Jack White, Ray Slann and Johnny Hepburn drop out of the front hatch into the darkness and I heard Ken Batten rotate his turret as he dropped out also. I still had not strapped on my parachute as it was still in its stowage position. Bill was sitting on his so he was OK. I told Bill that as we were still at about 18,000 ft. and baling out now would take us a long time to get down and we would have to use emergency oxygen. I asked if he could still hold her and he replied yes, so I got out two cigarettes and prepared to light them. When we got below 14,000 ft. I lit them and handed one to Bill. When the altimeter registered 10,000 ft. I suggested that he put the Hali on auto pilot to hold it steady for a while and then said "Are you ready?" he said "Yes" and we both jumped leaving L-Love to her fate. I learned later that Ned the Mid Upper Gunner was still in his turret and baled out just after we had gone.

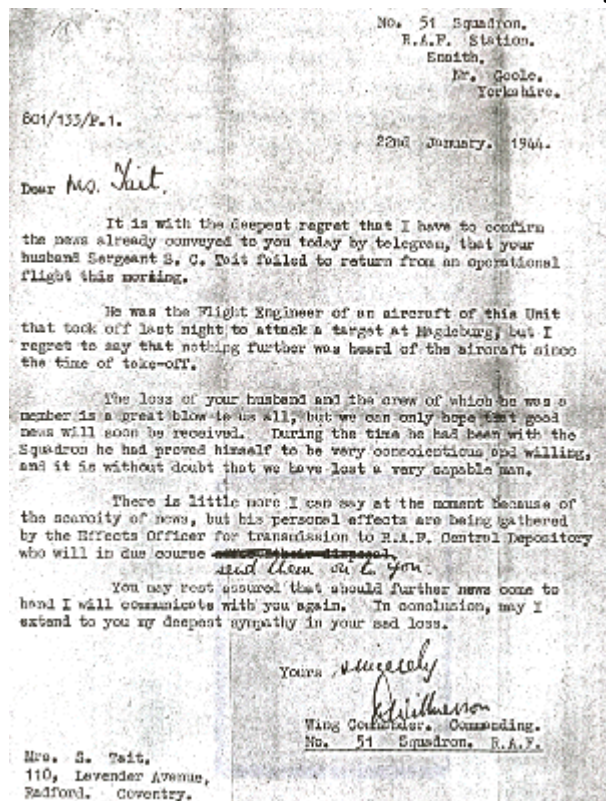
I fell into the darkness and felt the cold blast of air as I reached for the ripcord. I gave it a hard pull and the chute opened with a jerk. As I slowed down I thought ‘Thank God for the thick outer flying suit I had donned before we took off’ I normally flew with a thick sweater and battle dress uniform. The fur collar on the flying suit covered my ears from the frosty air and everything seemed very quiet after the noise of the attack on the Hali and the activity of baling out. I was now collecting my thoughts about what was happening to me, and then it began to dawn on me. Suddenly, I heard what could only be described as a loud rasping noise approaching, and it seemed to be coming straight toward me. I realised it was a German fighter approaching and its engine noise got louder and louder. For the first time since the German fighter attacked on our Hali, I felt real terror. I was convinced that it was going to ram into me while I hung there helpless. I recall thinking that it would be ironic if I were to be run down by the German fighter after escaping from the burning bomber in such a controlled way. The noise seemed to be right on top of me then the fighter roared passed a mere few feet away and its slip stream sent me and my chute spinning and yawing. I struggled with the lines and managed to control my chute and continued to drop more or less in a straight line. I must have been falling for several minutes when I began to think about what I should do when I got down. I looked down and all I could see was a white reflection below me. I was convinced I was going to drop into a lake or a river. I reached down for my Mae West (I was a non-swimmer) and held the handle ready to pull it. I was still thinking what to do in the water when the ground came up to meet me. I managed to try the standard knees bent roll over landing but went ‘Arse over tip’ What I had thought was water was frost and I ended up being thrown backwards in my chute’. I gathered in the chute and sort of folded it and carried it to the end of the field I had landed in. I reached for my cigarettes that I carried in my flying suit, but they weren’t there, they must have fallen out when I landed. I walked back to where I had landed but couldn’t find them. I went back to the side of the field and walked close to the hedge so that I could hide if anyone came by. I hadn’t walked for very long when I spotted a small hut. I tried the door but it was locked. There was a gap at the bottom of the door so I pulled the panel and forced it open. Inside there was a bail of straw and some garden tools. I lay down on the straw and wrapped the silk of the chute around myself. I was unable to sleep as my mind was in turmoil, so I just tried to keep myself warm. I looked at my watch and it was just before 06:00 hrs. I then decided to go outside to answer a call of nature. I was standing outside having a pee, when I heard the sound of voices, so I went back inside the hut. I looked down the lane through a crack in the door and saw two men both carrying what looked like rifles, walking towards the hut. One of them pointed to the hut and beckoned the other to go round to the rear. They both took their rifles off their backs and came close to the hut. I then kicked the door open from

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TELEGRAM
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PRIORITY CC MRS S TAIT 110 LAVENDER AVE
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DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR HUSBAND
1160996 SGT TAIT S C FAILED TO RETURN FROM AN
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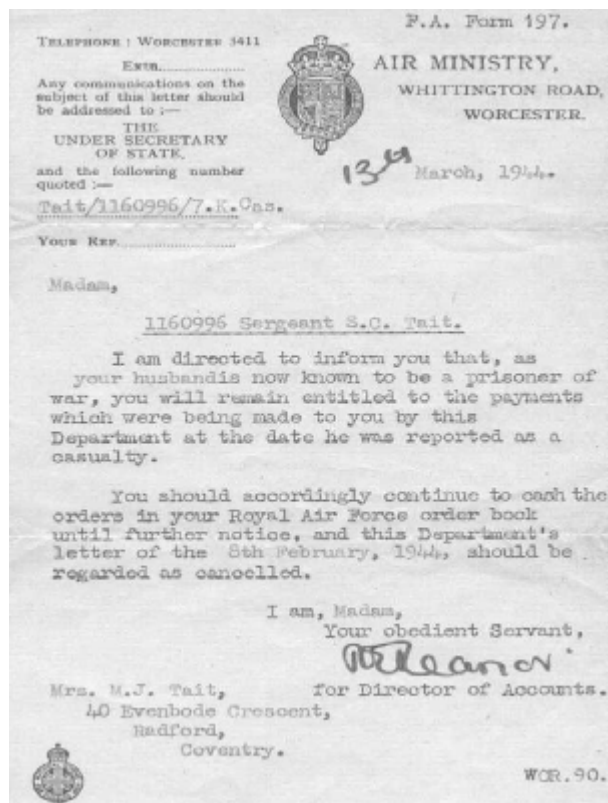
officer arrived and I was taken to what appeared to be a hall. I was taken inside, and there was Jack White and Bill Bruce. The first thing I did was to ask Bill for a cigarette. Eventually the rest of the crew, Johnny, Ned, Ray and Ken were brought into the hall. So we had all escaped from L-Love safely, and none of us was injured. We were taken to a fighter base and made to stand in a corridor and ordered to stand 10 ft. apart and opposite each other. This was to ensure we didn’t speak or pass messages. The watch I was wearing was the one, which belonged to my good friend Sam Godfrey. A German guard came and took it from my wrist and then tried to take my ring, but he gave up on that when it didn’t come off. I felt awful losing Sam’s watch. After a short while we were all taken to Dulag Luft Oberheusel, an interrogation camp. We were now Prisoners of War.

the inside so they would know somebody was inside, and then waited for them to come in. The two men were wearing armbands so I realised they were some sort of militia. They pointed their guns at me and beckoned for me to follow. They took my chute’ and one of them gave me a rake to carry. (This was to ensure where my hands were all the time) They were making signs asking for my gun, but I didn’t carry one, which I finally convinced them about. They walked me to the village whereon the man who seemed to be the senior of the two, took me to his house and called to his wife shouting “Frau, Engländer-Engländer!” I was still longing for a smoke so I reached into my battledress tunic pocket and found a half smoked cigarette, I then asked the guard for a light who obliged. After I had smoked my one and only fag, I was taken down to the local police station. The German policeman asked me for my name rank and number and that is all I told him. He picked up the telephone and phoned I presume the local Luftwaffe unit. Sometime later a Luftwaffe

We arrived at Oberheusel and were each immediately placed into a cell measuring about four feet square. The cell was very bare with just a small straw mattress and no blankets.



fool the Germans though. He then said you are a flight engineer and your squadron has just got a new adjutant who always twists his face when he speaks. He was dead right. We did have a new Adj and he did twist his face. That made me think. At that stage I was sent back to my cell.



The walls of the cell were painted white and with notices saying 'No writing' this was to prevent prisoners leaving messages for one another. We were given breakfast which consisted of a slice of bread covered with 'Airman's Honey' a crude type of margarine and a cup of Ersatz coffee, which was made of acorns, so I was told. When we wanted to use the toilet while in our cell we would move a lever, which let the guard know what we wanted and he would let us out. We worked out a system of signalling to each other by whistling a song that we used to sing on the return journey from ops. It was called 'Red Wing' and the words were so rude and crude that I couldn't possibly repeat them in these pages. I remember on one return trip we began to sing this song lustily, but someone had left his transmitter switched to 'ON'. So all the staff in control, including the W.A.A.F.s and the Wing Commander heard every dirty word of it. When we landed the Skipper was ordered to control and then further ordered to apologise to the W.A.A.F.s. The song 'Red Wing' became our code of letting each other know where we were while we were at Oberheusel. One by one we were called for interrogation. My turn came and I walked in and was confronted by a German intelligence officer sitting at a desk. On the wall behind him was a large map with a red tape stretching from England across the North Sea into the Baltic then turning to Magdeburg. As I was looking over his shoulder he offered me a cigarette and at the same time asked, "Where did the string go to from Magdeburg?" "I don't know, I fell off the end" was my sarcastic reply. That cost me the cigarette. He reached into his desk and brought out a book and opened it. He showed me a picture of a Halifax and said that they have Bristol air-cooled engines and that I flew them with 51 Squadron. Some chaps who were asked about the Hali's engines said they were 'Huntley & Palmer' engines? That didn't

Sometime later another officer came to interrogate me. I was lying on my bunk and as he came in I began to stand up and he said "There was no need to stand up" so I sat up and slung my legs over the side of the bunk bed. He began to speak but said nothing of the R.A.F. or service in general. "I just want to know about your mother and father and where you went to school and that sort of thing. He handed me a questionnaire and I read it and the questions went like this:

1. Who was your father?
2. Who was your mother?
3. Where did you go to school?
4. What was your bomb load on this mission and what type of aircraft.

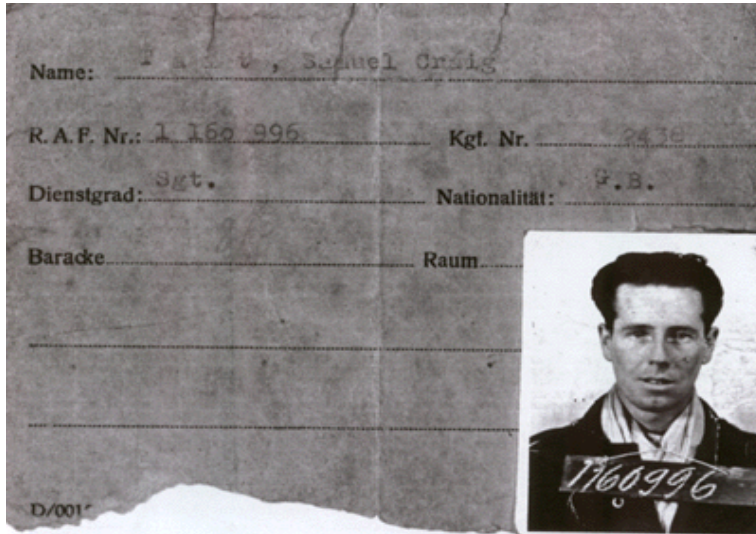
I looked at him and told him I couldn't answer any of these questions. He glared at me and said "You know I could have you shot as a spy, because you do not carry an identity disc (which I didn't) and the uniform you are wearing can be bought anywhere in Belgium. When I had landed by chute I had ripped off the stripes on my arm and 'E' brevet (tacked on one arm and on my tunic only) so it looked like any ordinary tunic. I answered once again that I could not answer his questions. It was then the German in him came out. He began to shout and remonstrate and told me that I should salute him, as he was a squadron leader in the German air force. He then stormed out of the cell.

We stayed at Oberheusel for about a week and then we were transferred to another Dulag Luft near Frankfurt, but Jack White was kept back for another couple of weeks as they thought he was a Mosquito navigator. We were told to be aware of an R.A.F. squadron leader amongst the prisoners who spoke perfect English and moved among the men asking all sorts of questions. We were told not to answer any as he was thought to be a 'Stool pigeon'. He was favoured by the Germans and received bowls of roses etc. and other favours. I didn't tell him a thing. I remember also that there was a Warrant Officer Hughes a Welshman, amongst us, who would broadcast

messages over the camp tannoy system, urging the POWs to join the Germans in the war. He said there was nothing for us in the camp and no chance of release. We all took no notice.

While I was at the Stalag Luft in Frankfurt we were once in the city centre being transferred and we were given permission to use the public toilets in the bus station. Due to the scarcity of toilet paper an old 'Crone' sat by the toilets where she would hand everybody just two pieces of paper. She gave me two and then asked "R.A.F.?" "Yes" I said. She snatched the toilet paper from my hand and gave me two bits of newspaper. Later in Frankfurt I experienced another air raid. This raid was by the Americans and it was terrifying and worse by far than the one I witnessed in Coventry in 1941. And during it, we were hidden in a shelter, which was really a slit trench. After the raid was over we went down the main street where we saw a wrecked B17 with its wings crumpled and fuselage smashed, lying against a building. There was no sign of the crew.

Shortly after the raid we were transferred to another camp, Stalag Luft 1 at the town of Barth close to the Baltic coast. This was to be my



prison camp for the remainder of the war for me and for many, many others. On the way to Stalag Luft, Jack who had joined us again got into a conversation with an Italian. The German guard pushed Jack away with his rifle butt and shouted at the both of them. Jack shouted back at the guard, which brought the German to attention. Jack then told him he was an officer and he should not treat officers in that way. Jack White was multilingual and so he could converse with the Italian and the German. Very useful! Jack was later to be transferred to Luft 3 in Sagan, the camp for officers.

Stalag Luft 1 was the main American P.O.W. camp with about 9,000 American prisoners and 1,500 were British. As soon as we arrived, they took away our flying boots, sweaters and scarves, to be taken away to the Russian front no doubt. After about two days I was issued with my 'Kriegie' ID, a metal disc about 2 ½ inches with my number 2438 embossed on it. We found that the ID disc acted as a gauge for cutting the bread ration we received. It was a crude but useful way of equal sharing a loaf into five slices.

There was one little Welshman who would sit for hours twiddling his signet ring around his finger, this caused immense irritation to most of us, but the young lad was simply sad and depressed. This little incident was as much to do with the tensions in the camp brought about by the frustration of being locked up and being far from home.



In my stay at the camp I would often get into conversation with the American airmen, who would go on about the B17 being a heavy bomber. I used to get them up tight by saying the Fortress was a medium bomber. When they asked why, I would say the Fortress carried the same bomb load as a Wellington and that was a medium bomber. Lancaster, Halifax and Stirling were heavy bombers, up to 14,000 lbs. and could carry more. They didn't take to it very well. Sport was fairly well organised especially football and I played in quite a few of the matches there, but ended up in the camp hospital with fluid on the knee under the supervision of the camp surgeon, a Captain Nicholson who had been there since Dunkirk. I used to think I was an expert on the mouth organ while I was in dock and the surgeon

suggested we play a duet. Well a bigger racket I have yet to hear. That was the end of my musical career. Tommy Rowe who used to play for Portsmouth before the war was in the camp, and another ex pro was Patten who played for Wolves. He was the dirtiest player I ever came across.

Occasionally efforts were made to escape but they always met with failure and in truth were half hearted affairs, it was really to keep up morale as much as anything. From time to time the Germans would bring in a heavy roller to run over the ground to make any tunnels that were being dug, collapse. On one occasion the roller sunk into the hole being dug, a comical sight. We found out there was an illicit Still being operated in the camp run by a South African. One night during an air raid when they had locked us up in the huts (This was to stop us escaping during the alert) the South African was going to open a bottle of illicit hooch as he leaned out of the window watching the raid. He dropped the opener outside and climbed out of the window to retrieve it and was shot dead almost immediately by a trigger-happy guard who had just arrived from the Russian front.

It was a few months after I had been in the camp that news of the invasion came through. We were all cheered enormously by the news and we knew it wouldn't be long before we would be free. (It took a site longer than we thought)

Close to Stalag Luft 1, was a German airfield, which housed a Goring squadron of yellow, nose Focke Wulf fighters. One day we were alerted by a fast approaching aircraft, obviously flying very low. We looked up and it was a Mosquito, which came in and strafed the airfield and then chased a FW 190 and shot it down in flames in front of our eyes. There was I'm sure, the loudest cheer of the war, ever, and everyone's morale picked up when that happened. Not long after the fire crew came to extinguish the fire and we began to cheer

even louder. This annoyed the German fire fighters so much that they turned their hoses on us. Close by the airfield there was a Flak school where Hitler Youth trained in the use of identifying a ‘Window’ and operating their guns while it was being dropped. The ‘Window’ was dropped by what looked like a small single engine JU 52 with the classic corrugated panel look. A strange looking aircraft.

Each day we would watch the German fighter-bombers take off from the airfield and head east. That meant only one thing; they were heading for the Russian front. Each trip would get shorter and shorter, which showed that the Russians were advancing very quickly.

As it became obvious that the war was going to come to an end shortly, the prisoners produced their own newspaper, the Barth Hard Times, (Albeit only one copy was produced). The paper warned of the imminent arrival of the Red Army. This did not go down to well with the Germans. In the camp there were several hundred Russian soldiers. They were treated much worse than we were. I would not say they were treated brutally, but they were given the most demeaning and dirtiest jobs, such as emptying the ‘Forty Holer’ toilet pans on the camp. They were kept short of food and basic needs, but that is how the Germans viewed the Russians. To help them out, the British and the Americans would give the Russians a Red Cross parcel to share between two men from time to time. It was the least we could do.



Liberation came in June 1945 (A month after the war officially ended) and we were liberated by the Russians. I had been a POW for 18 months and that was long enough for me. Some of the Russians arrived on horseback that were Cossacks and some of the Russian soldiers were huge women, almost like men. The Russian prisoners in the camp were immediately re-kited out with a uniform and a weapon and sent ahead of the advancing Red Army of occupation. No being sent home for them!

The Allied commandant in the camp was Colonel Zimski, even though we had a Group Captain in the camp. The Americans formed the majority and so Zimski was the boss. We were advised to write either ENGLISKI or AMERICANSKI on the back of our jackets so that the Russians would have some idea of who was who, and not try to shoot us. They were not too

fussy who they thought was the enemy. A few Americans decided to leave the camp and go into town to have some fun but the Russians did not like this and they shot approximately 11 of them. Colonel ZIMSKI advised everyone to stay put and not try to get out and give the Reds a chance to shoot us. The Germans had booby trapped the airfield by placing bombs primed to go off when disturbed and a Focke Wulf with it's undercarriage half way down was also booby trapped.

Came the Day when our liberation meant liberty. The Americans flew in thirty-six B17s and three Dakotas for all the POWs to be taken back west.

I was heading home.

Back Home!

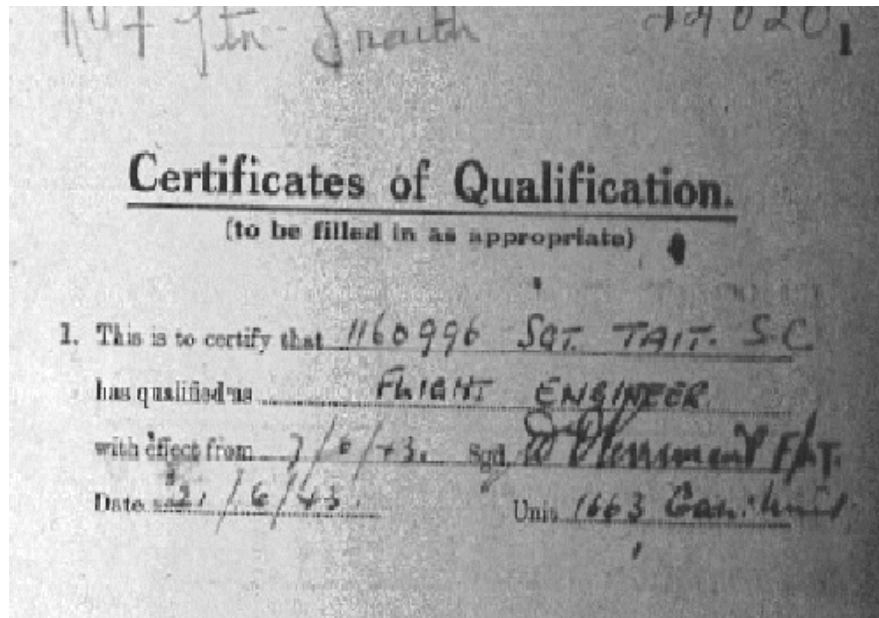
The POWs were tightly packed into the B17s, and I mean tightly packed. Five others, apart from myself and the other NCOs from my crew were squeezed into the bomb bay of the bomber. We took off and headed for Hamburg. The Russians controlled the air space over Germany from Barth to Hamburg (East Germany) and all they allowed for the transit flights was a one-mile corridor. If any aircraft strayed from that corridor, they were liable to be shot down.

There was a lot of Mickey taking on the way as the bomber lurched and shuddered as it headed westward. We finally arrived at Hamburg and within no time we were all flown onto R.A.F. Cosford and back to England. The feeling of actually being back home was indescribable. On arriving at Cosford we were given a medical, kitted out with new uniforms, given two weeks ration money and paid sixteen months back pay. This was now June 1945 and by then I had been promoted to Warrant Officer, which for me 12/- per day of which 3/- was paid to me and (9/- per day being allotted to my wife) Promotion normally came at one year intervals and as I was a Sgt. with almost a years service, I would have been given my flight sergeant approximately the time I was shot down. So it was Warrant Officer S.C. Tait who arrived home in Coventry. So with fourteen days leave ahead of me I had a few days to think of my future. The war was over and was I to stay in the R.A.F. if they asked, or should I return to Civvy Street! When I arrived in Scotland to see my parents, my mother told me that one night she sat up in bed and began talking. My father asked her what she was doing and she replied that she was “Talking to Sammy, he was in trouble” That night, was the very same night that I was shot down over Magdeberg.

As soon as I got home I made enquires about my brother Eric who had joined the army in 1942. He was safe and well after landing with his Corps at Arromanche Normandy shortly after D-Day. Eric was in the thick of the fighting and went right through the Low Countries right into Germany till the end of the war. He arrived at Hamburg and it was there that he met his wife to be Erica. They married shortly after the war ended and went to live in Scotland. (Later they moved to Hamburg, as Erica was not happy living there)

After much thought and discussion with my wife, I decided to leave the R.A.F. and settle in civvy street once again. I hadn't been out of the R.A.F. for more than six months when I received a letter from the Air Ministry asking if I would consider re-joining the R.A.F. I was offered my old rank of Warrant Officer and a £700 bounty as an inducement. I didn't need that much of an inducement, but it came in

handy and I accepted the offer without much thought. The reason it didn't require much thinking was that I was now a free agent. My marriage had failed and I was a single man. There were no problems of a wife not wanting me to go or any other family ties, so I was once more Warrant Officer Tait. R.A.F.



Once I had rejoined, I was posted to St. Athan to train on the flight systems of the Halifax and the Lancaster. After the course I was qualified as a flight engineer on both those aircraft. It was not too long after that I was made redundant in both those capacities and posted to Cottesmore in Rutland where I was expected to instruct on the Mosquito engine! I never did find out why they sent me, as I knew nothing about them? I sometimes flew in a Mosquito piloted by a fellow instructor called Jock Irvine who was in the next room to me in the Sgt.'s Mess. On one occasion we went to an air show in the Mossie for the public to look around. When the people came to look in it, Jock told me to up go inside while he helped the ladies to climb the ladder into the cockpit. He said it was best that way, as he didn't know as much about the Mossie as I did. It occurred to me later that what Jock really wanted to see were the ladies knickers as they climbed the ladder! Life was pretty good at Cottesmore. I was a warrant officer and so held the rank which most people took notice of. I was relatively well off and had my own room in the mess and everything was laid on. I often

spent my off duty week ends at Cardiff and I would cadge a lift (chipping in with the petrol) on the back of a motorbike owned by Sgt. Teague. It was while I was travelling to Cardiff one-week end that I was to suffer an occurrence that was to have a very great bearing on the rest of my life.

Came the weekend in question, Teague and myself set off on his motorbike. We were travelling though Cheltenham, our usual route to Cardiff when we came to a familiar corner and went round it as usual. We then ran slap-bang into a steamroller. I was dragged off the bike by my right leg, which was badly mangled. I also fractured my left thumb, and Teague suffered a fractured skull. We were both eventually carted off to the R.A.F. hospital at Innsworth a few miles away. At Innsworth the surgeon Squadron Leader Munro acted straightaway and amputated my leg just above the knee. I stayed at Innsworth for a few weeks after which Teague had recovered sufficiently to be sent back to Cottesmore. I asked him if he would take my flying boots back with him, which he did, and in the process went to my room and stole all my gramophone records and books. Thankfully Jock Irvine managed to get them all back. After having my thumb reset at R.A.F. Wroughton I was sent to Chessington Rehabilitation Centre for physiotherapy and further treatment. While I was there I palled up with a fellow amputee, Lofty Moor an ex Lancaster pilot. After a few weeks of physio we were considered fit enough to be packed off to Switzerland for a rehabilitation holiday. This was luck indeed. There was one snag. In those days there were very strict currency regulations, which barred anyone from taking more than £50 in sterling out of the country. This was hardly enough for a couple of drinkers and smokers, so we devised a plan. We were both on crutches which had screw in handles covered by string. So we unscrewed the handles, put £150 tightly wound onto the handles and screwed them back in place. It worked a treat and we strolled through Customs with a smile and with more than enough money for our 'rehabilitation' holiday in Switzerland. We were booked in at the Hotel Schweizerhof in Vargas near Lake Lucerne. It was a first class hotel and had the most stunning views of the Swiss Alps. We were in uniform all the time we were at the Swiss hotel and there were quite a few servicemen there and we did a lot of tasting the local and foreign brews. During my time at the Schweizerhof Hotel, Nase the daughter of the hotelier became very fond of me and we had several photographs taken together, and when they were developed, Nase seemed always to be by my side. It led to many an odd look by her husband? So came the day when Lofty and I had to return to England. My time in Switzerland I will never forget. When we got back to England we were both sent to Roehampton to have artificial limbs fitted. It wasn't just a case of fitting them and away you go. There was a lot of training and getting used to them and learning how to cope with stump stress and such problems. After a lengthy period of training we were considered good enough to be let out on to the public roads and footpaths. One day Lofty and I were strolling out in Roehampton high street, new limbs and all, when all of sudden, Lofty who had stepped smartly out with a little too much verve swung his leg and the foot flew off. A woman standing in a nearby bus queue fainted. Lofty caught her while she slumped, and held her up while hopping around on his good leg all the time shouting to me, "Get my bloody foot!" It caused quite a stir and a few laughs.

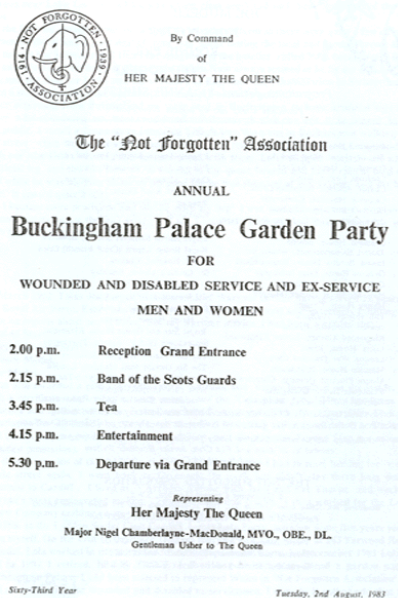
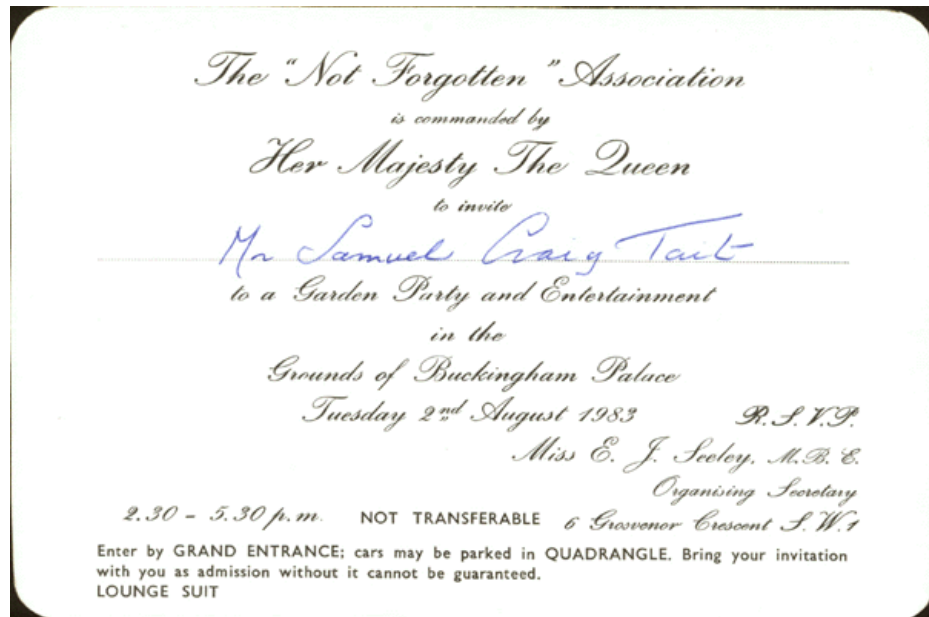
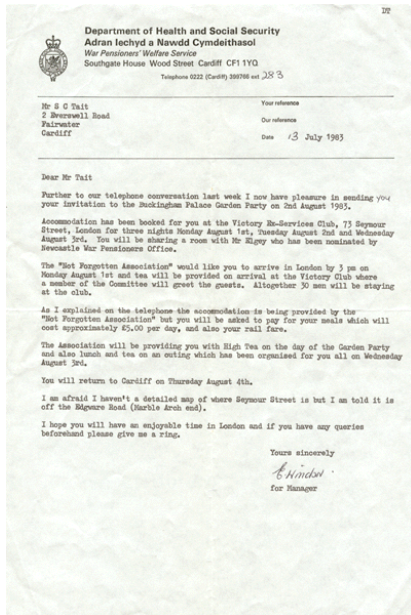
As I became more proficient with my new leg I was allowed back to service life and was posted to Kinloss in Scotland where I became an instructor on the fuel systems of the Lancaster. Kinloss was my final posting and after my tour there my service with the R.A.F. came to an end.

In March 1952 I was discharged with the rank of Warrant Officer having served twelve years with the Royal Air Force. Every single one of those years was interesting and extremely fulfilling and I have no regrets about my time in the R.A.F.

So there I was, out of the R.A.F. for the second time and looking for work in Civvy Street. I went back to my hometown of Greenock to work, but I didn't stay long and soon after I returned to Cardiff. Once again I went to live with John and Eve Thorpe of 3 Archers Avenue and managed to find a job with Curran's Steel Engineering making tank links for Centurion tanks. After a short while I left Currans and went to work for the London Screw Company making rivets and tungsten contact breakers for cars.

In 1958 at the Lydon Social Club I met Lola Perry a widow some five years younger than myself. Lola worked at the Macross Department Store. On the 17th of February 1962 Lola and I were married and set up home at 143 Farwood Road Llandaff.

In 1983 I was invited to attend a Garden Party at Buckingham Palace as part of the 'Not Forgotten Association' This was an association for wounded and disabled ex-servicemen. I thought it rather odd that I, a Scotsman, should be selected to represent Wales. It turned out that I was the only one fit enough to travel.



So on the 2nd of August 1983 I went to Buckingham Palace and met the Queen and was entertained by Anne Shelton, Ray Alan and several other show business personalities. It was quite an event.

In December 1981, after nineteen years of happy marriage, Lola died. I retired in 1982 but stayed on at Farwood road until 1990. I sold the house in 1990 and immigrated to Canada to live with my sister and her husband in Toronto. My sister and elder brother George had immigrated to Canada in 1947 and when I lost Lola they suggested I come over and live with them however the move didn't work out. I couldn't settle and even driving a car was impossible as they were all left-hand drive and I could only drive a right hand car due to my artificial leg. In 1991 I returned to Cardiff and went to live once more with John and Eve Thorpe, but in February 1992 I moved into my present address in Restway Court Llandaff. Restway Court is a set of privately owned very well appointed self-contained flats overseen by a warden. I am very happy here and very comfortable.

I renewed my links with 51 Squadron in April 1996 when I went down to Snaith with my brother Eric and attended a church service in Pollington. Later there was a memorial service at the old airfield where Ricky Pearce D.F.M. has created a memorial garden to the memory of those of the squadron who failed to return. Ricky has placed several plaques to men who were lost and a local man presented the squadron with a large piece of granite with the squadron crest engraved on the front. The day ended with all ex members and friends meeting in the village hall for tea and cakes then to the pub. While I was in the pub, I discovered that one ex member was none other

than Arthur Ellis of 'It's A Knockout' fame. Arthur Ellis was a P.T.I. with 51 Squadron. Each Remembrance Day a church service is held where all those who fell in all wars are remembered. During the reunion I met Tony Eaton whom I had spoken to over the telephone about the squadron. At the pub Tony offered to write my story and to this I agreed. After more than fifty years I finally got in touch with some of my ex crew mates. Ray Slann Bomb Aimer, Ned Richardson Mid Upper Gunner and Bill Bruce my Pilot. I am thankful that I do not suffer 'Night Demon' dreams as some of my contemporaries sometimes do. The worst I suffer is a dream where I am driving down the road in an aeroplane with cars and buses passing underneath. An odd dream but not a frightening one.

I was awarded a 'Gold' caterpillar with my rank and name inscribed on the inside along with a certificate confirming me as a member of the Caterpillar Club. The Irvin Parachute Company U.S.A. presented those two items to me. The Caterpillar Club is an association for all those who have saved their lives by baling out of an aircraft. The Caterpillar and the Certificate, my Kriegy I.D. Tag and the Aircrew Europe Star are amongst my most prized possessions.



For my wartime service with the RAF, I was awarded the; 1939-45 Star, Aircrew Europe Star, Defence Medal and the War Medal.



I am proud to have served with Bomber Command in what was the most unique military offensive in history. I am grateful that I returned safe and well, when many of my friends and colleagues 'Failed to Return' I am also grateful that my brother Eric and my sister Esther from the W.R.N.S. returned safely. Through the 51 Squadron Association I have made a few more friends and acquaintances and despite the occasional drawback, life is reasonably good. Thank God!

Thank You For Reading My Story