

MORE WAR MEMORIES
The RAF BOMBING RAIDS ON REVIGNY

In July 1944 three bombing raids were carried out on the railway junction and marshalling yards at Revigny, some 150 miles due east of Paris, which lay on the line from the Ruhr to north-eastern France, the Germans making full use of them to supply the battle zone. It was a strategic target that had to be destroyed, which was going to prove easier said than done. It should have been destroyed at the first attempt but extremely bad weather, and the Luftwaffe saw to it that a heavy price in planes and men would have to be paid before the job was completed.

Just 15 miles from the target was St Dizier airfield, home to an experienced night fighter unit who were going to make things difficult. During the three operations, 41 Lancasters were lost, and of the 287 aircrew, 231 were killed and only 56 managed to bale out to be either captured or assisted to evade by the French resistance fighters.

During this period I was with 1 Group and stationed at RAF Elsham Wolds. Two squadrons shared the station - Nos 576 and 103 of which I was a member, being rear-gunner of Lancaster. 'U' for Uncle piloted by Pilot Officer Roy Anthony. Our seven-man crew had been together for over six months, flying Wellington, Halifax and Lancaster bombers. We'd had some rough old trips but were convinced we would survive and see the end of the war together.

During June and July we took part in several missions, some by day and others by night, the enemy was always active, and the anti-aircraft fire in particular was intense and alarming.

Then came operation 'Revigny'. This trip was on and off three times, we were due to go on the nights of 8th, 10th and 11th July, but each time the trip was cancelled because of bad weather conditions. The raid was again re-planned for Wednesday 12th July.

The route to the target was very interesting if only for the distance to be covered - nearly 1,550 miles there and back. Instead of going in a straight line we were to cross the English coast at Bridport, Dorset, go around the Channel Islands, cross in over France by Mont St Michael, keep south of Paris and then swing north east to the target. We were to return by the same route, it was going to be a long, long trip.

The aircraft were loaded with a mixture of 1,000 and 500lb general-purpose bombs, and the fuel load was around 2,000 gallons. It was reckoned that a Lanc consumed one gallon per mile, the extra was added for safety.

Marking of the target would be carried out by 1 Group's own Special Duties Flight which was seven Lancasters detailed for this task. 1 Group were also to provide 100 to carry out the bombing - 38 of which were to come from Elsham Wolds 19 from each squadron.

After briefing we donned our flying suits and Mae West's, picked up our issue of chocolate bars and flasks of coffee then piled onto our crew bus and drove out to the dispersal where 'U' for Uncle sat, looking very businesslike. We each carried out our

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checks of equipment and then sat about on the grass waiting for the time to start up and go. The Padre, our flight C.O. and the Group Captain drove around to wish us 'God Speed and Good Luck', as they did to all crews on Ops Nights.

At approximately 21.10 hrs and still in broad daylight engines were started up and with everything in order we rolled out of dispersal on to the perimeter track waiting for the green light from the control van to line up on the runway. We waved to the usual collection of spectators, and when we got the second green light, the throttles were opened and we set off down the runway. This is when you think - *'What if an engine cuts out at speed and we do a ground loop with all those bombs aboard'* No such thing occurred and at approximately 21.25 hrs we were airborne and on our way to Revigny. By the time we crossed the English coast it was quite dark. It was a beautiful night and the stars were very bright, but thank the Lord there was no moon. German ack-ack guns opened up when we were passing the Channel Islands and again as we crossed the French coast. After a while firing ceased and the searchlights were switched off. Firing was then sporadic along the route.

As we were now into German radar range it was the job of one of the crew (Usually the bomb aimer or flight engineer) to throw out bundles of 'Window' to confuse the radar. This was done at a controlled rate - one bundle a minute increasing to five as we neared the target. We carried approximately 350 bundles - enough to resume the rate on the homeward route.

We roared on deeper into France, and enemy fighters were now attacking, the real show was about to start. At about 01.30 with the Lancasters closing in on Revigny and the fighters closing in on us, the unpredictable weather began to play its part. It was to have dire consequences for the raid.

All the crews headed for the briefed assembly point which happened to be about 5 miles from the German night fighter airfield and about 15 miles from Revigny. We had been instructed to carry out a wide right-hand orbit and await the order to go in and bomb.

We had flown at the low height of 6,000/8,000ft all the way from UK and had been briefed to bomb from as low a height as possible to ensure accuracy, and to ensure no French civilians were killed. It was made absolutely clear as well that we were to bomb below any cloud there was. In the event there was a layer of cloud 5 to 8/10th thick between 3,000 and 6,000ft. and below this cloud was considerable haze that made it difficult for the Special Duties Flight to locate the aiming point.

On top of this the Master Bomber lost his H2S radar and was forced to make a Dead Reckoning run from the assembly point to the target. He was unable to see clearly and was forced to delay calling in the main force to bomb, for 15 minutes he searched to find the aiming point. SDF crews were dropping illuminating flares over where they thought the railway junction to be, and with Sods Law working overtime the Master Bomber with his H2S already unserviceable then lost the use of his VHF radio due to

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er failure, all the ingredients for a colossal 'Balls up' were present now and the raid doomed to failure

ie meantime the rest of us had been flying round in ever decreasing circles for over minutes, waiting for the Master Bomber to tell us to come in and bomb. All we d was the Deputy asking 'What's going on' Just as chaos was setting in some /s heard the code word 'Lysol' to stop bombing and go home, broadcast, not by the ter Bomber but by his Deputy.

y crews, including mine, tired of waiting and just circling, saw the white flares and was enough for us. We had not flown all that way just to stooge around the enemy for 15 or 20 minutes, and then shoot off home. If we could see the railway lines r those flares, fair enough, it was going to be 'Bombs away'

semblance of control had gone as Lancasters arrived from all points of the compass, ng their left or right hand orbits. It was a real mess, the raid was breaking up, and e turned for home the German fighters arrived. The ME 110 fighters closed in and ed onto the milling bombers. The surprise was that in addition to their usual ard firing cannon they had 2 upward firing 20mm cannon, known as 'Schrage ik', (Jazz or Night Music). This allowed them to get into position in the blind spot r their victim and blast away. The first thing many crews knew about an attack when cannon shells ripped into their aircraft. (My crew found out about this on number two when we became victims).

1 the raid now falling apart at the seams, the inevitable happened. Two of the cs orbiting in different directions collided and went down in flames. Another had a ter slam into it, and again both went down. Our Guardian Angel was certainly with hat night and we were able to get out of the mess and fight our way home. JU88s ME110s made repeated attacks on us during the long haul out of France and they eeded in shooting down several Lancs.

ll 10 Lancasters were lost and 56 men were killed. The irony is that the target was damaged and the whole mission was a complete fiasco. Elsham Wolds suffered 4 ese losses with 25 aircrew killed.

d and shaken we were looking forward to landing at base, but this was not to be as olnshire was disappearing under a sea of fog, so we were diverted to RAF Blyton, re we landed about 06.30, nine hours after taking off. We were debriefed and fed watered, the aircraft were checked for damage and refuelled while we waited for fog to disperse before returning to base, around 16.00hrs, totally exhausted.

(To be continued) W H (Buck) Taylor

ten wondered where the sun went to at night, so I stopped up to find out...and then rwned on me.

urted out with nothing and still have most of it left.



MORE WAR MEMORIES (cont)

Continuation of the Revigny Saga

The weather was still bad over the continent on 13th July, so no night Ops were programmed for that night.

On the morning of 14th July, having slept well, we breakfasted before going up to the squadron to look at the flying training programme. We were on it, but just for fighter affiliation, a short trip of 45 minutes duration.


In the meantime Elsham Wolds received notice that a second raid by 1 Group would take place on Revigny that night. At briefing everyone was totally astounded, we could not believe that we would have to go back so quickly, if at all, the news rather knocked the stuffing out of us all, as the previous raid on 12/13th July had been a total failure.

1 Group would again provide 106 Lancasters for this second raid, Elsham Wolds share of this would be 12 each from 103 and 576 Squadrons. The Special Duties Flight, which had tried to mark the target two nights earlier being replaced by Lancs from the Pathfinder Force. The route however was to be almost identical, Base, Bridport (South Coast), the Channel Islands, in over the French Coast at Mont St Michael, keep south of Paris and then swing, with a slight variation, north east to the target. The return journey would be almost the same as that of two nights previously. The bomb load would be the same, as was the fuel load of 2,000 gallons, however we were to carry more than twice the number of bundles of window and start throwing them out earlier.

Briefing for the raid began at 18.45 hours after we had been fed, leaving plenty of time to collect our equipment and report to the assembly point. We were taken out to dispersal by bus as usual and carried out the checks on our individual equipment. At this point all seemed well and we sat around on the grass – but not together as we usually were, we seemed to be quite dispersed, and a look of gloom and doom was evident on our faces.

When the time came to take our places and start up the engines the trouble started. The port outer engine started coughing and spluttering, we had a mag drop. We got out and the ground crew took over to sort out the problem. In the meantime the rest of the aircraft were moving out of the dispersals and taking off, we had lost our take off slot. I'm pretty sure that some of the crew, including me, were hoping that Roy, our pilot, would call the whole thing off, but he didn't. The ground crew fixed the problem, and we got back into the aircraft, taking off 15 minutes late at approximately 21.45. The weather was far from good, with 8/10th cloud over Elsham Wolds and getting worse the further south we flew, until it was 10/10th over the coast.

We were reminded as usual by the German gunners that there was a war on; they were flinging up flak blindly but without success. There were a few skirmishes



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with enemy fighters along the route, but no casualties as the Lancs continued across France until we reached the target area where we were met by night fighters in abundance - ME 110's in particular, with JU 88's and single engined day fighters, FW190's and ME 109's joining in the action.

Over Revigny proper it was the turn of the Pathfinders to locate and mark the target, but the low cloud base and underlying fog were causing exactly the same problems as two nights before and they had difficulty in finding the aiming point, but nevertheless markers were being dropped.

Lancasters were orbiting and waiting the order to go in and bomb. It was mayhem as the fighters were homing in and picking off the aircraft. We had circled the target three or four times when the order came from the Master Bomber to abandon the mission. My pilot like some others decided to go round again as he felt certain he had seen the target under the markers and it was 'Bombs Away' before turning and setting course for home, feeling we had done our duty.

Enemy fighters followed the bomber stream and it wasn't long before we were attacked, there were some mighty bangs as cannon shells hit our fuselage. I shouted 'Down Port' to the pilot and he immediately threw the aircraft into evasive action, which he kept up for a few minutes before levelling out and then asking crew members to state their condition. There was no reply from Bill Wass, the mid-upper gunner, he was dead, and the bomb aimer Gerry Maughan, who had been throwing out bundles of window near to the mid-upper gun position when we were hit, was very badly wounded.

We thought we had lost the fighter - and although I was scanning the sky he got us again, more tremendous bangs along the underside of the aircraft, and it was now obvious that we were being attacked by one of the new, upward firing ME 110's. You just could not see them because they were operating from underneath the aircraft, and it became apparent that this was the end of 'U for Uncle'. We went into a steep dive, against which Roy the pilot could do nothing, and like the others, he was screaming in pain, and we were on fire heading quickly for the ground.

I pulled myself out of the turret trying to reach the rear door, but couldn't. I grabbed my parachute, attached it and pulled myself back into the turret, which I swung on to the beam and eased myself out. It was a good job that I was small, even so I lost my boots which stayed behind in the turret as the slip stream grabbed me, and away I went tumbling through the air where, luckily my parachute opened at an extremely low altitude, and I was ok.

The aircraft crashed in flames and exploded, killing the six other members of my crew, about 400 yards from where I eventually landed. I managed to reach a nearby house and asked for help, which they refused, obviously being afraid of reprisals.

I was captured soon afterwards, and I remember the German officer saying - "For you the war is over". He was right, and I spent the next ten months as a prisoner of war in camps Luft 7 and Stalag 3.

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Once again for absolutely nothing, 7 Lancasters and 43 aircrew were lost.

The following I obviously found out later.

The aircrew of No5 Group were in for a surprise on 18th July. They must have thought they had finished for the day after taking part in a huge operation that had started at dawn, when they had been employed on a massive assault in support of ground troops near Caen (Normandy) where elements of the German Fifth Panzer Army were dug in. Over 1,500 bombers, both RAF and USAAF had been involved which would normally be enough of a day for anyone.

But no! The Revigny railway junction and marshalling yards had not yet been let out of action and 5 Group had been chosen to put the matter right.

The weather over the continent had improved – not a lot, but sufficient for the brass to think that 5 Group could succeed where 1 Group had failed. The route to the target was changed, and a much shorter route was chosen, flying in almost a straight line from England to the target, but this was going to prove a far more dangerous thing to do, and it did prove disastrous. Out of the 106 Lancs taking part 24 were shot down, and a further 129 aircrew were killed.

The target was damaged but not destroyed, marking, due to the bad weather conditions again proving difficult.

Collectively, the Revigny raids were a failure, the target was a small one and, because of strict instructions crews were not to be careless with their bombing to prevent possible French civilian casualties. The extremely bad weather and the severity of the attacks by the Luftwaffe reduced considerably the chance of success.

The Germans too were extremely good at organising and repairing bomb damage, press-ganging about 2,000 men to clear up the mess, and had a line open to rough traffic in a few hours. The Allies on the other hand gained a delay of about 10 days at the most.


[This at a cost of 43 Lancasters, and the lives of 231 men.

Such is war!

W H (Buck) Taylor.

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MEMORIES OF WAR CONTINUED. THE AFTERMATH OF BEING SHOT DOWN

By W.H. (Buck) TAYLOR



My participation in 2 of the 3 bombing raids on Revigny in France in July 1944, resulting in the loss of our Lancaster and of me being the only survivor didn't stop there. I was told by a German Officer after my capture 'For you the war is over' He was only partly right, because I was about to embark on a most miserable and harrowing journey that was to last over ten months. As the saying goes - I was very much out of the frying pan and into the fire.

For the next two weeks I was shuttled about from place to place, travelling in trains and lorries - through France and well into Germany. Soldiers guarding me made it plain they would shoot me if I stepped out of line. Feeding me was not a top priority for them, but they did give me bits and pieces from time to time.

On 29th July we arrived at our destination, the notorious aircrew interrogation centre 'Dulag Luft' at a place called Oburvel near Frankfurt in Germany. I was immediately placed in solitary confinement, a very small cell that contained just a bed. Being midsummer it was very hot and stifling, but I had the impression that they were adding to the heat somehow. I could also hear periodic rifle bursts and wondered if they were executing prisoners. It all helped to scare me a bit.

I was subjected to considerable interrogation but couldn't tell them anything they didn't already know. After all I was only 18 years old and a rear gunner to boot. What could I possibly know that would interest them? After about three days I was taken from my cell to join other aircrew who I hadn't seen before. I think it was here that I was given my Red Cross official clothes and washing gear, and a pair of suede boots. I was indeed grateful for the footwear because I had lost my flying boots when I baled out of my turret, and had been walking about in my stocking feet ever since.

We were then loaded into cattle trucks and set off for the POW camp - Stalag Luft 7, Bankau in Silesia (now Poland) the journey taking about two days. The next thing I remember was being marched into a large compound surrounded by a high double wire fence, complete with watchtowers. The living accommodation for the prisoners was small wooden huts about the size of a single garage and sleeping 6 men. We called them dog kennels. There were no beds - only large individual sacks filled with straw, the camp had only been open for a month and was lacking any facilities at all. There was no lighting and only a very poor water supply - one hand operated pump for 800 men, and new arrivals coming in every day. The toilet facilities consisted of long deep oblong pits with logs along their length upon which you sat and tried not to fall in whilst doing what you had to do.

The good news was that a new living compound was being built next door and three months later we moved in. There was now running cold water, electricity, toilets,

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and showers, which were occasionally hot, plus, Bless the Lord, bunk beds. A total of twenty huts in all.

A 16 ft high fence covered in barbed wire the top 4 feet sloping inward to prevent anyone crawling over the top surrounded the new camp. There were also nine wooden watchtowers each containing a guard, searchlight and a machine gun placed at regular intervals. There was the usual trip wire several feet from the fence and any prisoner caught crossing it was liable to be shot, and occasionally was.

Luft 7 was a camp for SNCO's and as such I was not compelled to work. Each day was utterly empty and boring, the greater part was spent thinking about food, or rather the lack of it. Food provided by the Germans was a daily bowl of so called soup, a small ration of potatoes and a slice of black bread. The potatoes were not peeled and were covered in thick earthy skin. We were all so hungry all the time that we ate with gusto and would have had seconds if allowed.

This diet was obviously very poor and insufficient for our needs, but what helped us physically and mentally was the occasional issue of Red Cross food parcels, which gave us added calories to keep us going. In view of what lay ahead it is important not to forget this poor diet that we endured for months, because in January 1945 we were forced to leave Bankau at rifle point. More about that later.

Meanwhile the war continued apace and the Russian Army was giving the Germans a real beating, advancing all along the Eastern Front, and toward our camp in particular. I thought that as we were in the path of the Russian juggernaut, we would stay put and be overtaken by it all. Not so. On the day Warsaw fell, 17th January 1945, we were told to gather our meagre belongings and be ready to march off in one hour's time. We were also warned that for every man who dropped out of the column five others would be shot. The weather was absolutely ghastly and was probably the reason for the march being postponed for two days until the 19th of January.

There was no transport provided for the fifteen hundred plus prisoners, or the German guards; and the march commenced at the ungodly hour of 03.30. There was no change in the weather; it was bitterly cold, sub zero in fact and snowing hard. So into the freezing early morning we all marched, Germans and prisoners alike. It was quite orderly at first with the guards on the outsides of the column, but over time, trudging through the snow and not being able to see where we were going, prisoners and guards were soon all mixed together.

On the first day we covered seventeen and a half miles and finally stopped at a village called Winstersfeld where the only accommodation was several small barns and a school. I was one of those packed into a barn and it was so densely packed it was impossible to lie down. Freezing wind and snow blew through the cracks and made sleeping very difficult.

At about 04.00 we were awakened by the guards who were shouting and crashing about, and after a bowl of thin, watery soup we were on our way again. This time our journey was only 7 miles but took five and a half hours to complete. Our new

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accommodation was a disused brick factory, and I think it was here that we were provided with two field kitchens, each one capable of cooking food for 200 men, but as we were 1500 plus strong, you can draw your own conclusions. I don't remember getting any food that day.

The guards ordered us back on the road around 20.00hrs, our leaders protested but to no avail, they were told it was an order and must be obeyed. The Germans produced a horse and cart to transport the sick and off we went again into the freezing night with the temperature falling to minus 13 degrees. It wasn't long before the cart was full of sick, and, as others collapsed they were helped by their mates to continue. This night march was the longest and worst so far. We struggled and fell about in the deep snow, hour after awful hour.

What we didn't know was that we had to reach a certain bridge over the River Oder as soon as possible, the German Sappers had orders to blow it later in the morning. Pure tenacity saw us through that 20 miles to the river, but we didn't stop there. We had to struggle on a further 5 miles before being allowed to stop. It was 09.00 on 21st January and we were totally exhausted having covered 25 miles, taking 13 hours. Cow sheds and barns awaited us but what luxury – at least we were out of the snow and howling cold wind.

At 03.00 the next day, 22nd January, orders were given for us to march off at once. It was still dark and people were reluctant to move because of exhaustion and the fact they couldn't find their belongings. The German guards had an answer to that – they fired their guns, which had the desired effect.

We staggered on – this time to Jenkowitz, a total of 21 miles. We did see and pass through a column of German soldiers who were in an equally pitiful state, obviously retreating because they looked shattered too. One of their horses had collapsed while pulling a cart and some of the soldiers were hacking lumps of meat from its hindquarters, they were obviously hungry too. On arrival at Jenkowitz we were housed again in humble wooden barns, and were given soup but no bread.

This horrendous night marching, with very little rest at the end of it, and practically no food continued for several more days. The blizzards raged relentlessly and the snow was so deep off the roads you could hardly see over the top of it. Escape would have been easy but where would you go? And how would you survive? How on earth any of us had survived so far I don't know. We didn't want to die, that was it.

On 5th February the last stage of this hellish march got under way. The last five miles to Goldberg were accomplished, and lo and behold we were in the marshalling yards and we were put aboard cattle trucks – 55 men to a truck. We were all extremely weak and debilitated; Dysentery had broken out amongst the men. There was no room in the trucks to lie down – so some sat and the others stood – changing over periodically.

We remained in the trucks for three days and two nights, with no sanitation and no water – ideal conditions for the dysentery to spread. Even when the train was

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stationary for long periods we were not let out, you can imagine the conditions inside the trucks - it was filthy and stinking. The nightmare journey ended 25 miles south of Berlin and we tumbled out of the wagons just in time. Any longer and I think a lot of prisoners would have died. Personally I had great difficulty in straightening up and walking.

The journey that had started on 19th January finished on 7th February, a total of 20 days, and apart from the train journey we had marched 154 miles.

To be continued WH (Buck) Taylor

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THE AFTERMATH OF BEING SHOT DOWN

(Conclusion)

Now, to complete my story, we had arrived at another prison camp Stalag 3A Luckenwalde, near Berlin. We were to stay here until the Russians liberated us.

Shortly after arriving I went down with dysentery, as did many others. It's an absolutely ghastly complaint with perpetual stomach pains and diarrhoea. I was very weak before I started and very near to death with the disease. I remember being given doses of charcoal and something - cocaine I think, to bind me up.

Conditions in the camp were simply awful - particularly for we new arrivals. We didn't have beds, just straw on the floor and were lumped together like cattle. The camp was vast and separated into compounds. The inmates were of all nationalities, Russians, Poles, Slavs, Yanks and French - the latter being the most numerous and they had been there the longest. They also appeared to dominate the proceedings, but did nothing to help us.

After about two weeks Red Cross Officials visited the camp and as a result we each received a food parcel. After that was gone, it was back to soup and black bread.

The weeks passed and we wondered who would get to us first - the Allies from the West or the Russians from the East. Eventually, gunfire became obvious from the East and one day we awoke to discover that the German guards had gone. The Watch Towers were empty and to all intents and purposes we were free.

The next day, 22nd April, the Russians arrived and their soldiers' re-occupied the watchtowers. A couple of tanks drove down the camp roads with soldiers standing up in the turrets. One of them was a young blonde woman and I remember thinking how good looking she was. For some reason - I thought that Russian women might not be too pretty - I was wrong.

These soldiers were inviting us to follow their tanks to join them in the fight for Berlin. We all declined. I don't think we could have fought our way out of a paper bag.

Alas, our food situation didn't improve. The Russians only wanted to kill Germans not feed large numbers of prisoners.

However, foraging parties were searching for food and after a couple of days they discovered thousands of Red Cross parcels in a train in deserted Luckenwalde railway sidings and we felt better for each receiving one of them.

Our main overwhelming desire, apart from wanting regular meals, was to go home as quickly as possible, but the Russians who wanted to repatriate us via Russia were thwarting this, and not one of us wanted that.

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On 6th May a convoy of American trucks arrived outside the camp to take us to one of their bases and then home, but the Russians wouldn't allow it. This was too much for two others and myself. One of the U.S. soldiers – a Negro – was egging us on to get through the wire and into his truck. We did just that and we sped off to freedom.

A lot happened after that – suffice to say that eventually I was flown home to England, debriefed, given a new uniform, money and a travel warrant, and sent home on indefinite leave.

NOW MY WAR WAS OVER.

W.H. (Buck) Taylor

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There was a little old lady who was nearly blind, and she had three sons who wanted to prove which was the best to her.

The first son bought her a 15-room mansion, thinking this would surely be the best that any of them could offer to her.

Her second son bought her a beautiful Mercedes with a chauffeur included, thinking this would surely win her approval.

Her youngest son had to do something even better, so he brought her a parrot that he had been training for fifteen years to memorise the entire Bible. You could ask the parrot any verse in the Bible, and he could quote it word for word. What a gift that would be.

Well, the old lady went to the first son and said, "Son, the house is gorgeous, but it's really much too big for me. I only live in one room, and it's too large to clean and take care of. I really don't need the house, but thank you anyway"

Then she confronted her second son with, "Son the car is really beautiful. It has everything you could ever want on it, but I don't drive and really don't like the chauffeur, so please return the car".

Next she went to son No 3 and said, "Son, I just want to thank you for your most thoughtful gift. That chicken was delicious"

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Butterflies taste with their feet. (Something I always wanted to know)

An ostrich's eye is bigger than it's brain. (I know some people like that)

Starfish have no brain. (I know some people like that too.)

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