

Memories of Past Times

Ikey Love

1922 ~ 2016



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Pop's Beginning

Pop's father, James, was brought up in a wealthy family who ran and owned a tile and brick works in Risley, Bedfordshire. It was here that he met Pop's mother, who worked for them. They were married in 1916.

James was affected by mustard gas during the First World War. He was on the edge of the cloud, but was still badly affected and suffered lung problems for the rest of his life.



When his father died, the company went into administration and was closed. They then moved to Kettering, where Allen was born in 1920, Ikey in 1922 and Megan in 1924. Granddad worked for a doctor, looking after a horse and buggy, chauffeuring the doctor when required. He then moved on to an automobile with similar responsibilities.

Life in Kettering

While Pop was living in Kettering (in the 1920s), he was involved in petty larceny – though he insisted that he was actually helping to tidy up the streets. Hiding under a cart, Ikey and Allen would wait for the carts that delivered fruit to the warehouse. The fruit would often fall out whilst being unloaded, and Ikey and Allen would seize this opportunity; dashing out, grabbing the fruit (usually a banana), and making a run for it.

Steamrollers

At the age of about 4, Ikey decided to follow a steamroller for several miles. Spotted by a policeman, he did not know where he lived, so he was taken to a police station. Much to his annoyance, Grandma turned up before his promised ice cream.

Life on the Farm

When Ikey was about 8, the family moved to a farm at Six Hills called Walton Thorns. Uncle Wartaby rented a large farm and was finding it was too big to manage, so Granddad sub-rented a third of it. The water supply came from a local spring 100 yards away, eventually they dug a well. By a new law, the well was tested for human consumption, and was condemned as unfit. Asking the question: *What do we do now?* The answer was: *You will have to use it.* For safety they took a horse-drawn bowser over to the spring at Kirby Bellars.

Mains water was finally piped to all the farms when the ordinance depot at Old Dalby was built in 1937/38.

Speckly

A baby lamb, one of triplets, was given to Granddad, as the mother could not cope with all three. This was the practice at the time, orphaned lambs were given to families with children who would bottle feed them. Speckly was given to the Loves. As it grew it would follow them to school and meet them from school (as did a pig at one point). One day the lamb decided to push a hole through the hedge, and got onto the road, where it got knocked down and killed by a passing motorcycle. Grandma and Granddad, not being ones to waste anything, prepared the lamb for dinner. The family sat down ready for dinner which was duly served. Ikey asked: *Is this Speckly?* The meal was over!

Another pet was a cow named Benge, a full milking cow. Megan, Allen and Ikey would all ride this cow, which happily carried them around. It would charge through the hedge and go for a walk to the village.

Horse Power

The farm was mainly arable, all the hard work i.e. ploughing and cart pulling was done by horse power. Granddad had one horse which did most of the work. When required he would borrow another from the local farmer. Anything which was needed could be borrowed from another farm and similarly Granddad would loan horse and equipment to other farmers. (This would be called a farmer's collective today.)

Reducing the Rabbit Population

Ikey and Allen supplemented their pocket money by poaching (a common description for people who handled rabbits). They would trap rabbits and sell them at around one shilling each. Pop said Uncle Allen had to dispatch the rabbits as he was not strong enough. There was occasionally an organised rabbit reduction party when one of their uncles would organise a mass catching. None of this was legal.

Ikey and Allen often drove themselves to school across the fields, with Meg as a passenger, in a bull-nosed Morris. Ikey was 8 years old.

One winter it snowed heavily and settled for a couple of weeks, when Grandma surveyed the situation; she concluded that going to school was not practical. When the snow started during the school day, the children often got out to push the school bus that day. The bus stopped running to the outlying farms during this period. The board man, (a school official), up to his waist in snow, came to see why they weren't at school. Grandma's remarks were not printable!

Old Memories

During the 1970s, I was talking to a subcontractor who was reminiscing about his childhood. He remembered a farm at Six Hills, where he and his friend Allen went camping on Allen's dad's farm. Liberally coating the tent with 'dope' (a cellulose based varnish) to keep it watertight, they went to sleep. They awoke in the morning to find the fly sheet had been licked to shreds by the cows, who obviously liked the taste. When I got home I mentioned this to Ikey, who remembered the incident.



Wendy the Super Dog

Mother had a very clever protective dog called Wendy. The shop was 100 yards from the Clock Tower in the centre of Leicester City. Abbey Park was half a mile away through streets of terraced houses. When playing in the park, should they start screaming or call Wendy, she would be awoken from her slumbers in the shop, and within minutes be by mother's side checking all was well.

Caught on Camera

Before the Second World War, the river in Abby Park was partitioned off for swimmers. One particular day was hot so mother and her sister, Dolfie, were permitted to go for a swim, providing they only got changed at the swimming facilities! Promising to wait until they got there, they set off. Upon entering the park they immediately changed into their swimsuits. Having had a good time they went home. At home, Granddad Denning asked, *you were good girls and got changed at the swimming facilities?* To which they said yes. Granddad then opened the newspaper and showed them a picture. It was Dolfie and mother, in their swimming cossies, crossing the bridge, some considerable distance from the swimming area.

The Cat Got Away

Grandma did not own the 'Black Cat' (a cafe on the A46). They had a bungalow next to a petrol station and operated a profitable cafe there. The Black Cat opened later, further up the road. Then the petrol station began to encroach on the business. This is probably why they moved. One of the cousins married the owner of the Black Cat. The petrol station was owned by an uncle. Grandma sold the cafe to a once removed uncle, Bob Kirk, an ex-policeman, who was injured in the Birmingham riots c.1935, and suffered from memory problems.

Near-miss

When Ikey was about 8 he and a friend went to a local air display. Amy Johnson was giving a display, and when she landed and disembarked the aeroplane she decided to offer a trip to a member of the crowd. Walking up to Pop and his friend, she chose his friend. Ikey had to watch his friend climb into the biplane, flown by Amy Johnson, and fly away. When his friend's parents found he was in serious trouble. Shortly after this, Amy Johnson flew to Australia solo.

Mushroom Entrepreneur

While living at the cafe, Pop had a flourishing business picking and selling mushrooms. He would stand on the gate, and from this vantage point he spotted the best place for picking. He told the school bus driver, who then tried to muscle in on the trade. When Pop found out he directed the driver to a good field, knowing that the farmer, who objected to people picking his mushrooms, would be there.

Roads and Shelters

The dual carriageway was being built. (Pop saw it as a giant parking place for tanks in 1941/45.) The man responsible for overseeing the building of the road lodged with Grandma and Granddad. He also had the responsibility for the war bunkers/shelters in London, which became Churchill's bunker. That's how Granddad became a time-keeper at the site during its construction. Pop suggested this was in 1938/39, they knew war was coming!

From Shop Grease to Lorry Grease

When Pop left school in 1937, he found that getting a job was very difficult. He ended up working for a grocery shop in Sileby, at eight shillings a week. Grandma then moved to Downham Avenue, which meant an eight or nine mile ride in each direction. After a while Ikey decided this was too far and started looking for another job. Luckily three doors down was a neighbour called Les Court, who said to Pop, "you like messing with engines, come and work with me" (he ran a haulage firm). Pop immediately said yes. Les asked "Don't you want to know what I am paying?" Pop's reply was "I do not care." In fact Pop's earnings increased eight-fold.

Although Ikey was employed to maintain the lorries, occasionally he would deliver or collect items. Two instances come to mind – when collecting and delivering pipes for the water supply to the Six Hills area, (Manley initiated for the army supply depot) he had to ring Les to stop the contractor overloading/dangerous loading. The other was delivering sacks of cement to an airfield under construction. On arrival he was told "you're too late, no one will unload

you now". Ikey said "no problem, sign my chitty and I will unload". Obtaining the necessary signature and having a tipper lorry, Pop dumped the load and left.

Consequences of War

Uncle Allen was among the first to be conscripted, with no choice but to join the Leicester regiment, then to the Royal Military police and Egypt. Ikey was too young, he volunteered a year after for the Air Force and aircrew, as an air gunner on Stirlings (Grandma's remark was simply "I was expecting that.") At the medical he was told that he needed his tonsils out to become aircrew. Twelve months later and still waiting, the RAF found out he was a motor mechanic and offered him the position as flight engineer by letter, within a week he was in hospital, in reserved beds having his tonsils out! The most painful part was when Noreen thoughtfully brought some raspberry tarts in, Ikey says it was like eating brillo pads when they passed down his sore throat.

The Storm Clouds Were Gathering

The storm clouds were gathering as Europe became a darker place, but this did not stop the young from seeking fun and adventure. Uncle Allen was sent for his basic training near Ashbourne, Derbyshire. While relaxing in a pub in Ashbourne, three young ladies came down the hill carrying bags full of apples. They had been scrumping in their uncle's orchard. Several soldiers were hanging out of the pub windows, and upon seeing the young ladies they begged the ladies to share the apples. Auntie Doreen and her friends went into the pub to share the apples. Uncle Allen and Auntie Doreen met for the first time, which was the beginning of a strong friendship.

My Parents Meet

During 1938/39 Pop moved to Downham Avenue, just off Eggerton Avenue, where mother lived in her father's shop. Pop had known mother from fetching groceries, and they finally formally met during the blackout, when walking home from the cinema after seeing the film 'The Last Time I Saw Paris'. Pop was with a group of friends and came up behind a group of girls, introducing themselves, thus Pop met mother. The first date was very romantic! Mother was outside the shop with a group of friends; Pop walked by and said "Are you coming?" and Mother said yes. I believe they were going to the cinema.

Feathers and Aeronautics

During Ikey and mother's early courtship, mother told of a visit to one of Ikey's relations. Two things came to mind. One was that the bedroom mother was assigned to had a feather bed; this was a tall bed and the only way mother could get in was to take a running jump into it. On

landing and to her surprise on contact with the bed, she sank deep into it as it closed around her. Once you got used to it, it was cosy and comfortable. The following day when going for a walk a low flying Stirling bomber flew over, Pop looked up and said *I will be flying in one of those one day.*

Jealousy and Relief

Pop did not dance unless forced, and so he was quite happy for mother to dance with whoever she wanted to. The only problem was that when she returned Pop would be surrounded by a large number of young ladies vying for the attention of a man in an RAF uniform. He was glad to be rescued.

Women Could Earn Good Money

During the war, mother was sent to Taylor Hobson's, where she worked on various aspects of lenses, getting herself in a position where she earned £8 a week, more than many men at the time. Pop was on £0-15s-6p per day, £7 per week.

Living Under the Stairs

Although Granddad Denning had an Anderson shelter, they would shelter under the stairs during air raids because Uncle Arthur was paralysed (seized up) below the chest.

When Coventry centre was bombed and destroyed, mother and the rest of the street could see the blasts and hear the bombs raining down.

Wendy the Super Siren

The local streets were very lucky to have an early warning system of impending bombers. This was mother's dog Wendy, who would howl 20 minutes before the official air raid sirens.

Lucky Dip

Two days after the Coventry raid, a bomb landed on the great central railway – about 200 yards from the shop. All the doors and windows were blasted from their hinges, and the shelves in the shop collapsed. This meant that there was a sale on tinned food, a pot luck sale, as all the labels had come off. So you could be buying a tin of fruit, meat, vegetables or even cat or dog food. As there was no identification on the tins they were off ration.

Mistimed

While in basic training Pop and a couple of friends found a short-cut which they would take when on a cross-country run. They would keep to the back of the runners and slip into the woods when it was safe to do so. After a time lazing around they would emerge from the wood and join the tail-enders coming back. This worked well, until they mistimed their emergence and were spotted by the PT instructor – who kept a close eye on them thereafter!

Reducing Train Companies' Profits

Pop, while in basic training, learned with a friend that you could slip through a hole in the fence at Leicester and the train station where he was billeted. To this end he travelled many times to and from Leicester on the same ticket.

Life Jacket vs. Ability to Swim

Pop was told that he would never become aircrew unless he learned to swim. He was passed to an instructor who claimed he had never failed to teach someone how to swim. After several weeks of coaching he was told to always carry a Mae West (life jacket).

A Walk of Apprehension

During basic training, one of Ikey's tasks was to guard the beach and golf course at Redcar – this meant spacing men at ¼ mile apart. They would then march towards each other, turn round and march back. This was very worrying and eerie especially at night when it was cold and foggy you would see your opposite number when you bumped into him.



Left to right: Doreen, Blanch, Meg, Mother.

Pop came home for his 21st birthday, only to find that everyone had gone to Llandudno for the weekend. He celebrated his 21st on his own.

Play-acting Can Be Dangerous

Whilst at 90 squadron, Pop and the crew went for a Christmas celebration at the pub. They decided that a walk would do the Commanding Officer good, and upon seeing his car, they borrowed it. They decided that they were on a mission; this meant that one of the crew sat on the port wing and one on the starboard wing. Another was stationed looking out at the rear. As the car progressed along the road, an imaginary fighter was spotted at one o'clock, another from the rear. While taking evasive action, the car ended up in a ditch. Retrieving the car from the ditch, they continued back to base incident free. The C.O., unable to remember how he got back, could not report the incident – never knowing who took the car. He was probably unaware the car had been taken.

Flight Engineer At Last

Ikey qualified as a Flight Engineer on Stirlings on the 29th of August 1943. This was the first flight as an engineer: circuits and landings. He met his pilot with whom he flew with for the rest of his flying service: on 01/09/1943 flight sergeant, Pilot officer Hinde. The crew passed fit for operations on 10/09/1943, and his first operational sortie was 15/9/1943. He noted that the original throttles on the Stirling were connected via a hydraulic system, this would allow the settings to wander and constant monitoring was necessary. They were quickly changed to a cable system which was more consistent and positive.

Responsibilities of a Flight Engineer

The flight engineer looked after the Hercules engines fitted to the Stirling, or the Merlin engines fitted to a Lancaster. He would follow the pilot's hand when advancing the four engines' throttles, ready to take over should there be a problem. Taking over from the pilot when he was happy with the progress of the airplane, Ikey would take over to the normal stop – or beyond if required. Sometimes the throttle would be advanced beyond the safety stop, taking the engine's RPM much higher than recommended for extra power. He would then monitor the engine speeds, synchronizing them by looking through the propellers as this was more accurate a method than the gauges. As any flight engineer would say, a good flight engineer would know what was happening to the engines before his gauges told him.

Probably the most important job was monitoring the fuel usage. This was done by liaising with the navigator to receive information on hours of fuel required, and with the pilot, thus calculating fuel left in the tanks. This ensured that there was enough fuel to finish the operation and get home. Reducing the speed of the engines could seriously lengthen time in the air.

Bouncy Bouncy: 08/09/1943

The problems of two pilots one being tested, Ikey remembers Ken levelling the Stirling out for a landing. Pop looked out and realised the aeroplane was some 20 feet too high, it simply dropped onto the runway. Despite the reputation of the undercarriage being weak and unreliable, an inspection showed no damage. Pop's log book shows circuits and bumps with a large question mark.



The crew standing under their Stirling, right at the rear door

Ken looking out of the cockpit. The motive on the nose can just be seen, a kangaroo leaning on a maple leaf and a bulldog. This represented the nationality of the Crew.



Astronaut Training

Ikey was one of very few that could say he had been in a Stirling bomber during a full roll, an untidy roll! Ken the pilot was practising a side slip, a manoeuvre which was intended to confuse the enemy. This involved a hard left rudder one way while the aerolons were applied hard right. This would cause the aeroplane to side slip into a trough. Using the side speed, it was then manoeuvred using the rudder and ailerons back to the original altitude. Excessive use of the ailerons forced the Stirling to roll on its back; all engines stopping. Ikey became weightless as the aeroplane fell from the sky: the chemical loo emptying its content over the inside of the airframe, (the ground crew were not amused). Falling off the top and completing the roll all engines, it then restarted. The aeroplane lost 6,000 feet during the manoeuvre.

Loose Wheel

When a Stirling crash-landed its wheel came through the top of the wing it then preceded to roll down the hill towards a lady on a bicycle coming up the hill. The wheel of a Stirling is five feet in diameter and two to three feet wide. The oncoming cyclist managed to avoid the wheel, which came to rest without doing any damage. The crew of the Stirling were also unharmed.

Looking Through Open Windows Can Be Painful

Pop told the story of getting frostbite when checking the bomb bay. Opening a viewing window to the bomb bay, he then put his head inside. Checking all bombs had gone and lingering too long, he ended up with a frostbitten nose.

Flying on Fumes: 30/11/1943

On this operation to the south of France, the Bay of Biscay was the destination. They were to lay sea mines to the ports. On the home leg they ran into an electrical storm and the propellers lit up like Catherine wheels; a fascinating sight. The downside was that all the instruments went haywire, including the magnetic compass. With heavy cloud above and below, navigation was impossible. After flying on for several hours they let down to find themselves still over water. A radio distress call was made the ground stations, who estimated where they were and lit a series of search lights. Upon spotting the lights they were told that the Stirling was flying towards the Irish sea. The nearest air field was a fighter field in Cornwall, Predddenack. Vectoring them to the field the Stirling was lined up for a landing. Ken said: *We need to go around again*; Pop's reaction was: *there is not enough fuel – it's now or ditching in the sea*. She touched down, with heavy use of the brakes, as the end of the runway was a sheer drop to the sea. The Stirling came to a stop, having been in the air for 10 hours and 30 mins. A jeep with a light on was sent to guide them back to dispersal. After thinking they had killed the driver on several occasions, a radio message was sent asking the driver to stay further forward so they could see him. The next morning showed insufficient fuel left to achieve circuit height.

Pop mentioned that they applied for a transfer to air sea rescue. This was turned down because it was a backward step in the system. You were not allowed to go backwards.

Moving On: 12/12/43

Thus began conversion to Lancaster mark 3 at Upwood. Pop remarked the main problem with the Lancaster was the door was on the wrong side. Then with a little reflection, he remarked that the Stirling was designed around the crew. The Lancaster was designed and the crew crammed in.

Transferred to Oakington 7 squadron on 09/01/1944, Ken had decided he would like to join the pathfinders. I was told that, the speed at which Ikey and his crew were invited to become members of the pathfinder group was an indication that they must have been an exceptional crew.

20/3/1944 claimed a ME110 on an operation to Leipzig.

The crew at the side of the Lancaster, the crew at the back, ground crew in the front, Ikey on the right.



Tea-drinking in the Air

Pop would tell of the problems of tea drinking when on a mission. The flask was prepared and filled at ground level. It was then taken on the Lancaster for consumption at some point during the mission. Father's aircraft would usually fly at 27,000 feet. Being filled at ground level it was at a temperature of 212 degrees farenheight, boiling point. Now at 27,000 feet the boiling point of water is 165 degrees F. So as soon as the cork was removed the tea would boil and continue to boil until 165 degrees F was achieved. Pop never said what the problems of drinking boiling water were. Flask empty and back home there was another problem. The atmospheric pressure at 27,000 feet is approximately 5 psi (pounds per square inch, a measurement of pressure), whilst on the ground it is approximately 15 psi. Therefore, the cork was held in by 10 psi. A cork would be approximately 2 inches diameter, so it would take a pull of 30 lb to remove it.

Backward Pilot

One of the commanders at Oakington would pray for high winds, he would then take off in his Tigermoth by plane and land it backwards, i.e. the wind speed being greater than the landing speed of the Moth.

Pop was once on a charge for wearing his flying gloves outside the base. This was because he was at dispersal when he was told his bicycle was at the station so he went to collect it: on returning he was stopped, and charged. The adjutant suggested the mp needed an oil drum for his large head, charges dismissed.

Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Pop would climb into the overhead luggage rack when travelling at night. This was a string net so would be a little like a hammock. The guard would check what train station they wanted and would wake them when they reached their destination.

Uninvited Guest

Ikey recalls a situation where he was lining up on the entrance to the runway. The all-clear for takeoff came over the radio. The engine throttles were pushed forward and brakes released.

Suddenly a red flare went up: the emergency hold signal. The brakes applied and engines cut; an American flying fortress flew across the front of the aeroplane. There had been no radio contact and no clearance, it just flew in. On returning from the raid, and after a decent sleep Pop went to look at the B17 Fortress. As it was still there, Pop assumed it was in trouble, flying into the nearest field!

The Right Place at the Right Time

While flying circuits and bumps (landings) a warning came over the intercom that there was a lone bandit in the area. Shortly after, the only other aircraft in the circuit was shot down, the crew bailing out safely. Ikey's airplane was untouched.

Getting Bogged Down

Pop once made an emergency landing at Warboys airfield. We never found out why, just that they came off the runway and got bogged down.

The Damage a Bolt Can Do

On the return from a mission Pop noted that one of the engines needed several gallons of oil, as was mandatory he reported this and the engine stripped down. Ikey was then called to see the problem; a bolt had got into the super-charger, the vanes of the super-charger were practically striped. The confusing thing was that Pop had not noticed any loss of boost. (The super-charger is used to increase power when required and to maintain manifold pressure at altitude.)

The Penultimate Sortie

Pop was in their Lancaster; it flew out to the target but on the return trip one engine began to run rough. Pop quickly worked out that a valve spring had broken. He managed to set the RPM so the valve would move without damaging the engine. Fearing the valve would jam the engine if the engine speed was changed, causing the prop to shear off with a chance it could slice through the cockpit, Ken was told not to alter the throttle on the dodgy engine. Their Lanc got them home! But as the wheels touched down Ken throttled back all 4 engines. The faulty engine immediately seized but the prop did not break free. This left their trusted Lanc being repaired when the next operation came.

| | | | | | Time carried forward — 84:00 14:9:00 | |
|---------|-------|-----------------------|-----------|----------|---|-------|
| | | | | | Flying Times | |
| | | | | | Day | Night |
| Date | Hour | Aircraft Type and No. | Pilot | Duty | REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, evasion, etc.) | |
| 1/3/44 | 25:45 | LANCASTER III NO 454 | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | OPS "STUTTGART" (B/U) DCO. | 6:55 |
| 11/3/44 | 14:30 | NO 451 | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | 1 x 4000LBS. 5 x 1000LBS. 4 TINES. "Y" CROSS COUNTRY. | |
| 13/3/44 | 10:30 | "N" | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | "Y" BOMBING RUNS. | |
| 14/3/44 | 11:30 | N | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | "Y" BOMBING RUNS. | |
| 15/3/44 | 11:00 | O NO 454 | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | AIR TEST. | |
| 15/3/44 | 19:30 | O NO 454 | P/O HINDE | ENGINEER | OPS "STUTTGART" DCO. | 6:57 |
| 22/3/44 | | P 58 455 | P/O HINDE | " | 5 x 2000LBS. SHOT DOWN ON HOME LEE. FRANKFURT DCO. BY ACC. ACC. 4 CREW KILLED. MISSING. POW FOR DURATION. | |
| | | | | | DE B FLT | |
| | | | | | NIGHT | 18:52 |
| | | | | | TOTAL TIME | |

Pages from Ikey's log book. Ikey was on three of the most costly raids to the RAF. Twenty percent, one in five or twenty aircraft lost in every hundred. The average seemed to be five to seven percent. I have a copy of the RAF war diaries but some of Ikey's entries do not correlate.

22/23 March 1944: Life Changed

Pop was being sent to mark the target over Frankfurt in the spare Lanc. They took off at 18:58 from Oakington in a mark 3 Lancaster JA964 MG-P. The flight out was relatively normal, but problems started on the return leg. The aircraft shook as a hail of cannon shells raked along the body of the Lancaster. Ken, the pilot reported that the elevators had jammed, leaving the Lancaster in straight and level flight. Ken suggested that Pop should clear the escape hatch; this was covered in boxes of window (slithers of silver paper dropped to confuse enemy radar). Pop threw the "window," still in packs, through the shoot for that purpose, hoping that one of the blocks of silver paper would hit someone in the akak battery that had hit the Lanc. Another round of cannon shells tore into the starboard wing, setting it on fire. Ken hoped it was an engine fire, but Pop said no; the fuel tank was on fire. The order was given to bail out. Pop tried to retrieve the mascot mother had made him, but burning fuel from the ruptured fuel tank had been drawn into the back of the cockpit space, and he could not reach it. (The cockpit of a Lancaster was the size of a small three seater settee and only slightly wider). Pop went down opened the hatch and bailed out. The feet of the bomb aimer on his shoulders! A burning Lancaster would explode in approx two to three minutes. It was some 50 years later

that Pop realised that he had been brought down by a night fighter, fitted with cannons in the upper body pointing up at 45 degrees – a type Pop was unaware of. Probably shot down by Uffz Robert Koch of 6/NJG1 near Traben, Trarbach at 22:40 whilst at 5500m.

Had Pop's Luck Run Out?

Ikey and the crew had survived three of the most devastating raids bomber command had undertaken, where 20% of the bombers had been lost. Now he was floating towards enemy soil.

Down to Earth

The moment Pop was clear of the Lanc he pulled the rip cord, feeling the tug as the parachute opened, looking up to check the canopy was deployed correctly. His heart stopped – it was full of flames. Fortunately the flames billowed out. He had opened the parachute too soon and scooped up petrol fumes from the ruptured fuel tank. Starting at 27,000 feet he would have been passing through 25,000 feet when realising all was well, he would almost inevitably passed out when the adrenalin was gone, because of the thin atmosphere. He did remark on one occasion that he remembered the merlins (engines) cutting out just before blacking out. At about 10,000 feet the oxygen level would be enough to revitalise him, remarking that he woke as he was passing thought clouds: The total time to the ground was 15 to 20 mins. There was little chance of escape; German soldiers were waiting as he landed, blood running down his face: rifles pointed the direction in which he was expected to go with the word *commit*, he marched into captivity with the occasional prod from a bayonet, becoming a prisoner of war for the next two years.

Man Hug

Pop was taken to a crowded farmhouse where he met the bomb aimer Harry McMasters, who had arrived a few minutes earlier. Pop said this was the first time he had been cuddled by a man. The pilot was reunited with Pop during interrogation period; he had bailed out via the top of the cockpit. This meant that four of the crew went down with the aircraft, the average mortality rate for a Lancaster. Pop blamed his bloody face on the bomb aimer kicking him in his rush to bail out. 60 years later a piece of shrapnel was detected during a scan of his head.

Breaking the Rules Can Be Fatal

On the night that Ikey was shot down, there was a Lancaster which was crewed by senior personnel, out for a jolly, covering most disciplines. This was strictly against RAF rules. This aircraft was lost with all the crew killed.

Interrogation

Interrogation was simple, you tell the interrogator what he already knows and you are moved on.

The Accuracy of the Press

Ikey's going missing made the local paper. The report said that Ikey's Lancaster had gone missing while on a secret mission deep into enemy territory. When he finally returned home and was asked what the mission was he said: "What mission – it was a normal raid, the newspaper report was rubbish!"

Dear John

While Pop was a POW mother wrote to him saying that Roy Baily kept asking her to go dancing with him. Pop's reply was *enjoy yourself, go dancing*. Within a few days of her first dance, Pop received a "Dear John" letter, telling him his girlfriend was gallivanting with other men.

Pop was in Stalagluft 6 in Hidacrude Lithuania. He spent several nights in various other prison camps en route to and from.



The picture of mother Ikey carried while a POW and for the next 70 years.

Problems of Being a Guest of the German Government

Pop over the years has spoken of things that happened while a POW.

He was now POW at No. 3277 Stalag luft 6. Heydekrug Lithuania. The other survivors Hinde and McMaster were at Stalag luft 1.

There was a problem caused by prisoners trying to escape. The order came to handcuff all prisoners. When this came to Ikey's camp it took approximately 2 hours for one of the inmates to come up with a key to release them. When the British government heard of this it was made clear that all German POW would receive the same treatment. So the handcuffs were removed.

The camp was short of a clock, so another POW manufactured a clock made from used tin cans. The spindle of this clock went through the partition wall to the next hut. Of course this meant it went backwards in this hut.

The water supply was from a pump drawing the water from underground. The water was cold so when it rained they would shower in the warmer water; unfortunately if the rain stopped too soon it was back to cold the pump.

Pop said they had a good system of bartering (usually using cigarettes) with the guards for goods from outside the camp. This was ruined by the arrival of overpaid Americans.

When the camp was put under various restrictions/sanctions, the POWs would cheer. When they were removed they would boo. The commandant was heard saying: *these "bloody" English will drive me mad.*

While in a camp in Lithuania clouds would come in so low that you would be in the clouds when standing. Several of these would be thunderous, on one occasion striking one of the tents and killing some of the occupants.

One of the American POWs was from the Deep South and had opinions about black Americans which led to a warning that his health was in danger if he did not modify his verbal thoughts.

The Long, Cold March Home

Pop was in a prison camp in Lithuania. As the allies advanced, (the Russians), half the POWs walked towards and across Poland to Germany. Pop was loaded into a coal barge i.e. a 12 foot ladder into an unlit hold. The precision of the loading was that of an 18th century slave ship. He with the other prisoners was then transported across the Baltic to the Polish port of Stettin through very dangerous waters, upon arrival at Stettin, they disembarked to start a long march away from the allies (Russians), the destination/direction changing to avoid the allies. They had minimum supplies and had to carry their own food and essentials – one blanket and water to collect at any place permitted.

Cosy Sleeping to Survive

As it was winter, the way to prepare for sleeping in the open was as follows; collect as many twigs and as much straw as possible to raise you off the floor and cover with some of the blankets. Six to eight men would climb on top as close to the next man as possible to conserve heat and cover with remaining blankets, then the men on the outside would move to the centre at regular intervals. With food minimal and very cold weather, many would collapse. If unable to continue, a guard would dispatch the prisoner with a bayonet, leaving the body at the side of the track. (The bayonetting of exhausted prisoners was taken from a book called 'The Last Escape'. Father disputes this and will not have a word said against the guards.)

I have recently learnt that at some point after Pop left the march, two new ex-concentration camp guards joined these guards. This is probably when the atrocities started. These two guards were eventually dispatched by the march prisoners.

The Gods were Looking Down

Fortunately for Ikey, he collapsed outside a hospital which took him in. The main thing Pop remembered was the intravenous drip, believed to be glucose, that cursed through his veins, warming as it went. He was suffering from malnutrition, frostbite and dysentery. It is interesting that father held no malice towards the march guards, saying that they suffered the same privations and conditions as the POWs.

The Last Escape

Pop's final prison camp was in Poland, the Russian zone near to the West. When the Russians arrived they flattened the fences with tanks. Pop stayed firmly in the strip trenches until it was safe to come out. The Germans had long gone. All the prisoners were sent to the West, except the pilots, engineers, navigators and wireless operators. An American officer came on several occasions attempting to negotiate their release. On his last visit, no progress was being made. The officer said to the assembled prisoners "I cannot come again but I will offer a way out. Climb into the waiting ambulances and I will attempt to take you to freedom." There was little discussion before they began to fill the ambulances. Several prisoners that were known would not be released were pushed under the seats covered with blankets and sat on. The saving grace was a prisoner who spoke fluent Russian (a Polish-born American who spoke fluent Russian). Using his skills he talked them through several Russian checkpoints: to freedom.

A BMW Delayed Their Return Home

They arrived at an American supply base. Pop was told to get his head down as there would be several days before repatriation. He had barely fallen asleep when he was woken, hearing “There is a Dakota heading for England if you want it.” Pop got ready and went out to the aircraft. Problem: two American soldiers were trying to load a liberated BMW motorbike and side car into the Dakota. Motorbike loaded, they flew back to Britain.

When Pop had been through the necessary medical checks and debriefing, he got on a train and headed for home, unaware that there were a large number of ex POW returning home that same day. When he arrived at Leicester train station and saw how busy it was, he decided to take the old illicit route, court a taxi and arriving home that way. Later he found the crowds were there for a civic reception for the returning POW.

Transcript of the Little Bible

The little bible was given to most prisoners of war (POW), and although thousands were given out, few have survived. Some POW found the paper made for good cigarette paper. Pop’s writings on the inside cover page were in pencil and has faded over the years. The writing would cover the period of disembarking from the coal barge to the Russian liberation.

Set out on Feb 6th marched about 300km. Fell ill on 25th. Taken to (2D) on 6th March into hospital on the 16th , 18th started to recover but still weak. Polish doctor in charge has been excellent.

26th April still in dock being left to Russians, 27th 12 midday saw first signs of Russian attack, returned to shelter Evening getting really close.

Approx 11pm first Russian tank arrived at camp gate slept in full Kit.

28th still strong, German A/C dive Bombing, nearly hit

..... evacs.

Building a New Future

The war was over and Pop had to settle down to a future; a future that on many occasions he thought he might not have. Four of the crew – his best friends – lost their futures and are buried in a foreign field; Rheinberg war cemetery in Germany.

Now it was time to propose to mother. Being a traditional thinking person he went to Mr. Denning to ask for mother’s hand in marriage. Granddad had no objections but did add a warning! *You do realise that Noreen will have you broke (penniless) within six months?*

Now he had the problem of convincing his mother that mother was a good choice for a bride. Grandma Love objected strongly to the union. Her objection was based on the fact that Mother's brother Joe was in a hospital for the mentally ill, and she thought this might be hereditary. In fact, Joe had suffered from Meningitis which had affected his brain. Pop, still in the RAF, finally decided to go ahead and marry mother. Securing a 48-hour pass from the RAF, arranged, secretly with a special license, to marry at the local church. Granddad Denning, a friend and the loving couple assembled at the Belgrave church on the 22 June 1946 and were married! When Pop told his father (Granddad Love) he was quite upset, not at the marriage but at the fact that he was not there! This was a marriage that would last 70 years: loving years, in which they were only parted reluctantly by work and hospitals, and even then only for the shortest of times. It was a relationship that to some would have been suffocating, but my parents would have had it no other way.

Always Do Your Best, There Are Consequences

Pop had been granted a weekend pass - 48 hours - in order to go home and get married. He took a trade test and was keen to get home, so did just enough to pass. Whilst he had passed, the RAF felt he could have done better, so he was ordered to take a further test to improve on his marks. This meant his leave was reduced to 24 hours.

Sanctuary for Joe, But Too Late

Father had agreed with mother to take in Joe (mothers brother) and hopefully he would settle down. Unfortunately he died before they could take him in. Mother was convinced that the asylum, as they were then called, had experimented on him and eventually causing his death. This was at a time when they were trying some bizarre treatments on mental patients.

Home and safe, Pop went back to repairing lorries, with a few deliveries when necessary, and life began to get back to normal. Granddad Denning still had an influential position in Leicester and managed to get the parents a house round the corner. Grandma Love was again upset because Ikey had managed to find a house before Pop's sister. Granddad Denning had decorated most of the house for the parents for when he was demoted (but remained in the reserves).

To Stay or to Go

Pop would have liked to stay in the air force, but mother preferred that he leave. It was also the case that the RAF would not guarantee that Pop would be able to fly again.

They were thinking of immigrating to Australia to enter into business with one of the crew, McMasters, but this was suspended for a few years.

The Family Begins

They moved into the house with not much more than a bed, a table and orange boxes for seats. They welcomed a Labrador pup, Sandy, into their home, a dog of great insight and courage. They would tease him by both beckoning him to come to them. Sandy would look at them both and sit firmly between them, refusing to show favourites. Sandy would also walk down to Granddad Denning's shop to collect his daily bun, holding it firmly in his mouth and would not eat it till back home.

Over-eating can be a Problem

Sandy was a hungry pup who would eat at any opportunity. Ikey would often feed him raw meat, and on one particular occasion he had taken delivery of the following week's meat supply which he had put in the front room. Sandy found a way into the room, and proceeded to devour as much meat as he could. When the parents found him, he was in great distress. His feet could barely touch the floor as his stomach was greatly extended, making movement almost impossible. This was a very sad and uncomfortable Sandy, who did not eat again for several days. The upshot of the incident was that Sandy would only eat what he was given by the parents, and seek their sanction before eating offerings from others.

Human Family Begins

Furniture now sufficient to be comfortable, Mother became pregnant with Paulette. When their first wedding anniversary came round, Pop was walking up the drive with a bunch of flowers. The lady next door leaned out of the window saying, "Has it been a year already?!". Pop replied "Yes, are you disappointed?" In other words, it was not a shotgun wedding.

Paulette arrived on the 12th July 1947 to the adulation of all the family, including grandparents on both sides. Mother's friends would bring in clothes they had purchased for their children, which mother would borrow, taking them to Grandma Love and within 48 hours would have a good copy of the garments for Paulette. I was told that Paulette was sitting on the floor in the shop having shown no interest in walking, when Granddad Love walks in to purchase some goods, looks at Paulette and says "come on then." Paulette got up and followed Granddad up the street.

Those Damn Kids

One of the problems mother had was children knocking on the door to see if Ikey would come out to play.

Major Changes Were Afoot

Me, Garnet, came along in September 1948. Unfortunately this was shortly before Granddad Denning died. The government had decided to nationalise the transport business in the UK. It was organised in such a way that father found motor engineering no longer satisfying. So Pop and mother sold their house and moved into the shop, taking on the day-to-day running for Grandma Denning. This lasted only a few years, as negative interference from the rest of the family caused Pop to rethink his position. Deciding it was untenable he found a job as a constructional plater, building conveyers at a company called Universal Conveyers. Meanwhile, I had no intention of walking, as all fours was much safer.

It was also during this period that father learned that the pilot of the crew, Kenneth Hinde, was missing over the sea. There were two left.

Helping Customers to Get out of Debt

After looking at the shop's books, Ikey realised that several people owed money and so set about reclaiming the debts. He did this through consulting the debtors, agreeing to an amount which would be added to the shopping until the debts were cleared. Most of the customers thanked Pop and were grateful for his help in getting them out of debt.

Silent Walking

Being children living in the shop with uncle Arthur meant an education in silence. Our bedroom was above Uncle Arthur's room. So as not to upset Uncle Arthur (who was very intolerant) we had to learn to walk silently and talk in a near whisper. I remember Paulette reading to me and we were laughing at the pictures, when mother came up to tell us to be quiet. The result of this early training was that, to this day, I am often accused of creeping up on people. Recently I was talking to Kay, my cousins daughter, who lived with Arthur under similar conditions. She remarked that people are always complaining that she creeps up on them.

Uncle Allen's short lived revenge

While reminiscing some time ago, Pop told the story of Uncle Allen being uncannily able to pick winners at the dog racing. The onsite bookies would not take his bets. He had a following that would bet with him. When trying to confirm this story I approached his son, Stewart, who did not know of this. Then, added with a bookies at the end of the street, they recuperated their losses and considerably more on behalf of those bookies who lost.

With the departure of father, the shop's future came into doubt and all decided to move on. Pop was sold a piece of land by Granddad Love who had 2/3 of an acre he had brought earlier with a house. So Ikey paid £10 for 1/3 of an acre. Querying the price, Granddad said, "Do not

worry, the others have had their share.” When the land was parceled off for sale in the nineteen twenties it was £27 per plot. 2/3 of an acre was two plots, therefore cost £54. Granddad in 1953 purchased the house and two plots for £400.

Before we left the shop, Pop learned he was the only one left of his crew. Mr Mamsnnus had been killed by a drunken lorry driver while on his motorbike. This was the last connection with Australia, so emigration was no longer on the cards.

On the piece of land, Pop built a bungalow costing £2500. Included was some cash fiddled by the builder so Pop’s mortgage could help buy some basic furniture. The £50 was beyond their reach, which would have secured the garage. Grandma, Dolfie and Arthur pooled their money, moving into a house built especially to accommodate them. This bungalow at 169 Colby Drive was to become where the parents lived for the next 60 years, the rest of their lives together.

Do Not Forget Sandy, Our Caring Labrador

Sandy decided to become the guard dog for Paulette and I. When mother decided to put Paulette and me in the pram on the front garden of the first house, he sprang into action. Mother heard a growling coming from the front garden. On investigation, Sandy was sitting with one foot on the gate refusing to allow the postman in. Sandy was a very well built dog. So mother had to move us to the back garden.

The second incident, though not the last, was when mother had left us in the pram outside a shop, with Sandy on guard. He would happily allow people to admire us, but touching the pram was a definite no no. He would growl loudly, putting off the person from going further, and warning mother. Sandy would walk by mother’s side without a lead so was welcome on any trip.

Sandy was treated like one of the family, if we had an ice cream sandy had an ice cream. When the parents had a cup of tea sandy would have a cup of tea. But when we were eating sandy would have his own bowl on the floor and not be allowed to pester the table.

Sandy would always sleep outside in his kennel. One cold winter at the shop, mother took sympathy on him and put a warm carpet inside the kennel for him to sleep on. When they woke and looked out, they saw that Sandy had pulled the rug out of the kennel and was sleeping under the stars.



Sandy on guard

Pop was the one who trained Sandy. He had an affinity with farm animals, and I was with him many times when out on the farms or in the countryside. Pop would beckon a cow, sheep, horse or pig, and these animals would come to him – whether to be stroked or to listen to him talk. I have even seen him calm an unruly dog. The last time I saw him with a horse was when we were on holiday – the horse stretched so far out to greet him, it nearly knocked him over.

Before moving to the Bungalow, and for one subsequent year, Paulette and I attended private school. This stood Paulette in good stead for the move to Secondary Modern. Myself I emerged with social skills, which stood me well for the rest of my life, but academically I was useless. So when Paulette left for higher school I decided to leave for the village school, where I learned more academically in 18 months than I had at any time before. I also, apparently, taught etiquette to my classmates.

At Granddad's suggestion, Sandy was kept on a long tether in the back garden of Colby Drive, to become accustomed to his new home. The move took longer than expected; Sandy would manage to get loose and on several occasions made his way back to the shop to find us. Unfortunately, on his last escapade he was knocked down, and died at the vets.

Making Ends Meet

Not long after we moved to Colby Drive, the interest rates soared to sky high figures. As it was a recession, all overtime was stopped. Pop insisted that we pay the extra cost of the mortgage, so money became tight. We could not heat the house, so we lived in the lounge. The fire used so much coal that I remember going down to the bottom of the garden with Pop to saw logs, using a two-man saw. The logs were then stored in buildings at the bottom of Granddad's plot. May I add, (I am looking for sympathy now), snow was often falling while we sawed.

Open Cast Mining

Then Pop noticed that there was foundry coke in the hardcore road running down the garden. Experimentation showed that if we reduced this coke to the size of half a teabag, we could

burn it. Unusually for a house built in this period we had a central heating system, but could not afford to run it. Using this hard coke Pop managed to heat the house. However, there is always a problem with something that comes free, and in our case it meant that the boiler could not be controlled consensually – it needed a full air flow at all times. The result was that when you wanted a bath then you would get a great deal of steam before hot water. Now for the sympathy, instead of sawing logs I helped Pop dig out the coke and using a lump hammer reduce it to a size that could be burned. Could this be child abuse? Almost certainly kids today would think so, child labour. I certainly enjoyed myself. Another advantage was that there was no longer ice on the inside of the windows. Towards the end of the fifties Pop built the first model glider, which we flew in the surrounding fields. This was the start of my interest in model aircraft.

We built up a large flock of model gliders over the next few years, all of which were flown in the fields that surrounded the house whenever the weather conditions were suitable. The wind strength was judged by the movement of the Poplar trees a few gardens away from us.

Pop never forgot the RAF, and would go outside whenever an airplane heading for Castledonnington could be heard. He always had a yearning to get back in the air, preferably in a Lanc or a Stirling.

It's Time For a Rant About Self-seeking Politicians

Pop was never quite reconciled to the fact that Bomber Command in Europe was never fully recognised. He would watch the memorial march past at the Cenotaph and see all the Campaign medals adorning the chests of the Army and Naval personnel, only to reflect that he and the other one hundred and ten thousand men of Bomber Command had nothing to show for their service and sacrifice. Fifty Five thousand men lost their lives, thousands were injured – and yet no government over the last 70 years has fully recognised them.

Like the battle of the North Atlantic, the bomber war fought throughout the Second World War. From the then outdated Blenheim, and Whitley Bombers that harassed the enemy from day one, suffering great losses, to the main bomber offences, the men of Bomber Command were there.

Much rubbish has been spoken about the bombing of German cities and the effectiveness of the offensive. One idiotic so-called expert on the subject suggested that it was ineffective as the German war production never dropped below its peacetime output. Britain increased its war production by fivefold, despite German bombing of British cities. Yet with the legendary organisation of the German people they could not. The reason for this certainly was not the pen pushers and politicians in Britain.

There were three letters placed on the records of those men whose mental stress caused them to be stood down: L.M.F. – Lack of Moral Fibre, code for coward. These three letters could certainly be placed before those politicians over the last seventy years who have hidden

behind others and protected their political life under any circumstances. Denigrating those one hundred and ten thousand men, half of whom did not reap the benefits of the peace.

When people think of the situation, Dresden always comes up. This was not a target thought to be of significance by Bomber Harris, their respected leader. It was a political decision which we may understand in another 30 years when it comes out of the official secrets embargo. Yet from another point of view it was not innocent. My information suggests this city produced the guidance system for the V1 and V2 flying bombs that fell on Britain. These indiscriminate weapons would have fallen in much greater numbers without Bomber Command.

The last thought is that many of the Germans and German equipment was kept back to defend the cities from the bombers. These resources could have been easily deployed on the Russian front or to the Normandy Beaches to complete and man the fortifications (the Atlantic wall).

When I asked Pop what he thought of his bombing efforts, his comments were that when you were bombing you did not think of people on the ground only the target. Afterwards, he went on to say: I saw the devastation of Coventry, Manchester, Birmingham and the South coast. They were responsible for this, they set the rules.

There's something that I almost forgot, as it was so irrelevant. In 2014, Pop received an addition to his euro star, a bar of stamped bronze with four holes in it. The holes were for a 90-year-old frail man to sew on. This afterthought was, by some, considered to be an insult to the men of Bomber Command. The only reason he received this bar was to beat the Russians to decorating the men of the North Sea convoys that had supplied Russia, at a great loss, at their time of need – a well deserved recognition. But this piece of stamped bronze was the idea of a committee of civil servants, who clearly had little respect for Bomber Command. One wonders why a few effective pacifists can ignore so many. Mainly to protect their own jobs.

The Dishonourable Politicians

It was very noticeable that no politicians lined up to present this bar. I saw no politician giving this piece of stamped copper to any of the men of Bomber Command. I have never thought much of medals, because social status and rank affect what is given, and of course because of the politics behind it all. But they do mean something to the men who receive them.

The Unexpected Surprise

We found mother was expecting my brother Peter in the early sixties. His birth was eagerly awaited; of course he decided to come into this world just before Christmas. With complications, mother and Peter did not come out of hospital until mid January.

The weather was atrocious, with almost continuous fog and temperatures at or below zero. I believe the sun was not seen for some two months. We did not have a car at this stage, and the nearest bus was half a mile away. Down the length of Colby Drive there were no more than half a dozen lampposts. The road was unmade, with puddles in broken tarmac several feet across and between one and two feet deep. These would then turn into small ice rinks. I remember a pothole which was ice lined, probably 18" deep and six feet across. Having trapped myself in this pot hole, I began running round in circles trying to stand and remount my bike. The only solution was to sit in the hole and eject my bicycle, which slid some distance. Then I crawled out of the hole collect the bicycle and continued to school. I should add that the night before it had rained, and as the rain hit the ground it froze on contact. The whole of Thurmaston was an ice rink, and there total chaos everywhere.

Pop told the story of a workmate who fell off his bike at the top of a hill (Silverdale drive). Sliding down to the bottom, he looked back to see his bike was halfway up the hill with its handle stuck in a drain cover. He arrived at work one hour late having spent all this time trying to retrieve his bicycle. Most of his attempts to retrieve it were foiled by sliding back down the hill. I have never seen such conditions since. Pop managed to get to work without incident.

Mother and Dolfie had been to see a fortune teller, which was popular at the time. The reading in mother's case was interesting.

The fortune teller predicted that she could see a small child racing down the hall and turning left around the corner. This was dismissed as she would not be having another child. Little did she know! This was exactly what Peter would do, just a few years later.

She was also told that a red car would signal the start of better times: Pop would buy a red mini from his friend which did indeed signal the start of better times.

Several other predictions were never to come to fruition.

Below the certificate pop was very proud of, yet only a few people today realize the significance of the Pathfinders force in controlling the accurate bombing of a target. These men were among the most skilled the RAF had.

His other possession which was highly valued was his caterpillar badge, a gold broach with red ruby eye. This was awarded to all that had used a parachute to save their lives. With this broach he became a permanent member of the Caterpillar Club.

His uniform was used for gardening until worn out and finally dis-guarded

Farther had been to most of the significant targets including, Berlin (3) , Mannim, Leipzig, Stuttgart (3) , Schweinfurt, and several other places in Europe.



ROYAL AIR FORCE

PATH FINDER FORCE

*Award of
Path Finder Force Badge*

This is to certify that

1815027 SERGEANT LOVE , A.I.

is hereby

Permanently awarded the Path Finder Force Badge

Issued this 27th day of MARCH in the year 1944.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. J. ...', is written over the printed title of the signatory.

Air Officer Commanding, Path Finder Force.