100 SON. 25 FEB 1944.

## RON CILLE'S BALE-OUT.

On the night of Pebruary 25/26th/we were short down on our way to Augsburg.
Our course was close to Freiburg, heading for Switzerland, but before crossing
the border, we were todo a sharp turn to port and on to Augsburg. It was noted

the border, we were todo a sharp turn to port and on to Augsburg. It was quiet at the time, then a heavy explosion. We dived away and there was a burst of shells at the height we had been. The damage had been done by the first shell. One engine had to be feathered, due to overheating, the radiator was punctured and the controls and instruments were damaged. The Bombardier was unconscious and the Navigator hit in the face. The Pilot also had a wound in the head. but did not say so at the time. There was a discussion between the Filot and Navigator and they realised we would not get home - they also found that we could not get rid of the bombs. Smoke was coming from the bomb-bay and we were leaving a long trail across the sky. (I remember thinking "Hope a fi shter does not see that, as we are a sitting duck") The Navigator said that we were about ten minutes.from Switzerland if we stayed on course. This we did, but after a few minutes the Pilot said that he could not hold her any longer and we had to go. The Navigator protested that we were not there yet, but the Pilot said "You still have to so", and gave the order to bale out. My last words were to the Navigator, asking which way to walk and may "Good Luck". The Bombardier was conscious by this time and the Engineer was able to successfully bale him out. We all got down O.K. but the Bombardier was not found for three days and was dead. I was told later that we were in a long line of landing of about 20 miles. I went out of the main door after the Wireless Operator at about 19,000 feet. I remember pulling the parachute open, but then passed ou t and came to hanging in the air. The Mid-Upper Gunner saw the aircraft explode in the air. I landed in a tree, but was unhurt. I decided to wait until daylight before making a move to find out in which Country I was. When it was half-light, I moved down a track in the wood and could smell wood smoke. I came upon a cabin style house. I

went around from tree to tree looking for some h int as to where I was but to get

close to the house I had to cross a clearing. I was just doing just this, when the door opened and out came an old man, carrying a bucket. I do not know who had the biggest fright - him or me!!! As he had seen me, there was no point in running away, at least until I found out inwhich Country I was. I walked up to him and cointing to the ground said "Deutschland" - one of the few German words I knew. He replied "Nein" - "Schweitza" - to which I replied "Switzerland" and he said "Ya". I then said "R.A.F." and was warmly shaken by the hand. He took me into the house, in which there were two ladies and two boys (both very excited) and they gave me food. I showed them where the parachute was and they took me into a nice warm bedroom, where I took off my outer clothing and went to sleen. I was awakened by someone wearing a grey uniform and a German style helmet, prodding me with the barrel of a rifle! I thought I had been tricked, but having a second look I realised that it was a Swiss. I was taken to the local Polace Station at Hinwil - a room in the front of an ordinary house. He made me walk in front and he followed with his rifle at the ready and the two young boys brought my gear and parachute on a sledge. The guard was an elderly man and I think was really enjoying bringing in his prisoner. They sat me in a windowseat with the guard and there was some conversation, after which a lady approaches me. I stood up a brought my heels together and she turned to the guard and said "Beutsch?" I think I was too enthusiastic with my "attention"! She then brought me tea and cake when she knew I was R.A.F. After about three quarters of an hour, a car arrived with two men in long black leather overcoats and widebrimmed trilby hats (talk about Gestapo!!!) They questioned me and I took the only line I had been told. I stood to attention and gave my name, rank and number and said that was all I could say. To my utter amszement, this brought forth cheers and claps from all in the room. I did add that there was more than one man in the aircraft and that he was out there wounded. Another car then arrived and to my delight the Wireless Operator slighted.

They then took us to Zurich to an army barracks and fed us and asked more questions about how we came to come into Switzerland. They seemed satisfied that we were flying a crippled aircraft. We then moved again to the Swiss Air Force base Dubendorf, where we met up with our other crew members. Also there were a number of crews from the 6th Air Force. During the day there had been a running fight over one of the lakes and some had to ditch or land. All very interesting, but I think it paid to watch what you said, as I felt the place was bugged. After a day or so, they took the six of us to a Hotel on the outskirts of Bern, where we were to be in quarantine for three weeks. This did not turn ou t to be isolation. as we needed such things as shoes, toothpaste, etc., so we used to telephone the Legation and they would send on official and escort to take us to the shops. The more the visits, the less the escorts! Eventually, only the official used to come and then after a few days some of the 8th joined us. (At this point I think I should tell you that an Internee in Switzerland had to wear uniform, but an Escapee must not). As we were the only R.A.F. there in uniform, we caused quite a stir when in town.

After about a week, the funeral of our bombarier was arranged at Yevey. A big occasion, but, of course, hard going for us. Air Comadors West took us to lumch. It was decided that we should be interpreted at Adabboards in the Bermed Cherade with the Americans. Whilst there we were taught to ski, etc. - it was like a holiday. Of course, it was not possible to escape, as it was an island in the middle of enemy teartfory. I did hear of two who did, but they were both emespees, who had spent six months on the run in France before reaching fostershand; they had learned to speak French and all the tricks, and they later encaped again and got to Spain and back home. This was very rare. A number of W.A.F. Rombers creshed in the mountains whilst we were there and being in unifors we had to due through adard of known on several occasions. Some of the Americans came to represent year Country.

After the maid on Friedrichshafen by the R.A.F. we were joined by about another ten airmen. The American crews were coming in considerable numbers. I did not count them, but it was quite a few hundred. This was due to the attacks on the Southern targets, being damaged and not having enough petrol to get back to base. In May we were told that we were going home. The Swiss were arranging an exchange of R.A.F. and Germans, who had strayed into Switzerland. (It was rumoured that they were wanted for Court Martial back in Germany). Visas were arranged and civilian clothes provided and we were taken to Basel and handed over to the Germans, with a Swiss Diplomatic Escort. Basel Railway Station was half in Germany and half in Switzerland, you stepped over a yellow line and were in enemy territory - a very strange feeling. The German party was made up of one highranking officer and two guards and a corporal. This corporal spoke perfect English, had been educated at Oxford, and I took him to be an Intelligence Officer in a corporal's uniform. From Basel we travelled to Baden-Baden, where we changed trains. We were taken from the Station to a restaurant for a meal. It was the first time I had ever seen a Nazi salute given - the Manager of the restaurant to our so called corporal. The meal consisted of a large helping of fresh fish (Plaice) and wine, etc. - all very good. We then caught the Express to Paris, arriving mid-day next day. Had a air-raid warning on the Station - another strange feeling! Onto an army 'bus, complete with two armed guards. They seemed intent on guarding the 'bus from outside attack, rather than us. Our destination was an Army Mess for aneal with the Officers. The French waiters seemed to know who we were and showed their pleasure by tapping the "V" sign and putting a large slug in the lettuce on the corporal's plate. We continued out journey that evening, travelling all night towards Spain; when it became light we were able to see the guards, etc. spaced out along the Atlantic beaches. Of all this we made mental notes for when we returned to England. We-reached the Spanish border during the

sorning and parted from our German Escort - what a relief! The Swiss stayed with us on the train to Mearid. Bice seal on the train - starting to feel free. We had four days in Medrid nighteesing and then the Swiss left us and a track case up from Gibraltar to take us back. A few days there and then # back to England on a schedule flight B.O.A.C. The Air Force had comeons waiting for us and took us to London to the Air Ministry for de-briefing - as much as we could tell then about bond damage, troop movements on trains, etc.

Then back home to good old "Fram" (Bir mingham) and leave.

## \* MAT1944