

100502. 25 FEB 1944.

## RUN CIL22'S BALE-OUT.

1944

On the night of February 25/26<sup>th</sup> we were shot down on our way to Augsburg. Our course was close to Freiburg, heading for Switzerland, but before crossing the border, we were told 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 Pilot and Navigator and they realized 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 fighter 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 go", and gave the order to bale out. My last words were to the Navigator, asking which way to walk and say "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 out 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 hint as to where I was but to get

delight the Wireless Operator alighted.

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 8th 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 out to be isolation, as we needed such things as shoes, toothpaste, etc., so we used to telephone the Legation and they would send an 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 Bombarcier was arranged at Vevey. A big occasion, but, of course, hard going for us. Air Commodore West took us to lunch.

It was decided that we should be interned at Adelboden in the Bernese Oberland 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 territory. I did hear of two who did, but they were both escapees, who had spent six months on the run in France before reaching Switzerland; they had learned to speak French and all the tricks, and they later escaped again and got to Spain and back home. This was very rare. A number of R.A.F. Bombers crashed in the mountains whilst we were there and being in uniform we had to do the funeral Guard of Honour on several occasions. Some of the Americans came to represent <sup>their</sup> Country.

After the raid 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 high-ranking 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 a meal 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 our 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

morning and parted from our German Escort - what a relief! The Swiss stayed with us on the train to Madrid. Nice meal on the train - starting to feel free. We had four days in Madrid sightseeing and then the Swiss left us and a truck came up from Gibraltar to take us back. A few days there and then back to England on a schedule flight B.C.A.C. The Air Force had someone waiting for us and took us to London to the Air Ministry for de-briefing - as much as we could tell them about bomb damage, troop movements on trains, etc. Then back home to good old "Brum" (Birmingham) and leave.

\* MAY 1944