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MID UPPER GUNNER OF HALIFAX JD 166 ZA-G
No 10 Squadron Bomber Command

Night of 6th September 1943

We were detailed to bomb Munich. This was the very first night that the whole of the bomber force - 404.4 - engine bombers - Lancasters and Halifaxes were routed directly over London at 5000 feet. The trip was fairly uneventful for about 4 1/4 hours, apart from the usual search lights and odd burst of flak, and occasional sightings of other bombers en route, when the rear-gunner sgt. O'Kill suddenly shouted "fighter coming in from astern." It was not heard on Monica. Monica was an early warning radar device. The pilot Flt. Lt. Douglas immediately corkscrewed the Halifax. The fighter, an ME109 fired its guns, but missed us and then dived below. It then resumed the attack from almost the same position. It came in again and this time the rear gunner fired at it, but it was too low for me to get on to it. The fighter fired again, but missed. It was lost to sight. We were all fully alert, when it suddenly came again and opened up on us at very close range, its shells and bullets (tracer), passing just a few feet above us. We were diving and the ME109 went over the top of us only a few yards away. Both gunners aimed all their guns at it from fairly close range. I continued firing at it after the rear gunner lost it, as it was over the top of us. It rolled over and fell away into the darkness. The last I saw, was something white stream away from it. It looked like a puff of white smoke in the dark, but must have been a parachute. My researcher in Germany, H. Grimming, has found that this ME109 crashed at Memming, the pilot baling out. This all tied up with the information of timing and position that I gave him.

The navigator, P/O Murphy was logging this action, when our Halifax was hit by a JU88 nightfighter. It came up from underneath. Our aircraft was set on fire immediately. I gave the enemy aircraft a long burst from the mid-upper turret as it was pulling away from starboard. H. Grimming, air-war historian, has found that the JU88 was damaged and one of the crew was killed by the return fire from the Halifax. The pilot asked the extent of the damage; I said "the top of the starboard side of the rear turret had gone". He then called the rear gunner over the intercom, but there was no reply. I then reported a fire in the starboard inner engine and wing was getting larger, with flames now coming into the fuselage. The captain ordered the bombs to be jettisoned. The Flt. Engineer Sgt. Gurton called out that the wires and cables to the starboard wing had been cut. The fire was spreading very rapidly. I could feel the heat now in the mid upper turret from the burning incendiary bombs and petrol. The Captain ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft. I asked if I should go back and see if the rear-gunner was alright, but he said "no" and "get out". I got out of the turret, picked up my parachute, which was in the corner by the main spar, clipped it on and made my way to the rear of the aircraft to the mid-upper gunners escape door. The flames from the fire gave enough light through the holes in the fuselage to see the way over the bomb bay door, down the steps to the aircraft floor. I could see the door and opened it easily. That was the last I remember of being in the aircraft. I do not remember leaving the aircraft or pulling the parachute rip cord handle. The next memory is swinging on the parachute and seeing as I swung around, four other parachutes. I did not see the burning aircraft, or see it crash.

human eye witnesses have told me, that it circled the area five or six times before it finally landed up where it did. They said it was well ablaze and making a lot of noise, which really frightened them, as they did not know where it was going to crash, as crash they knew it would.

The ground seemed to be coming up to meet me and I remember seeing a lot of water and drifting over it. It was either a large river or lakes. Just before I hit the ground, I saw a parachute ahead of me not too far away. I landed in a large field, which had been harvested, near a forest. I lay on the ground for a few minutes to get over the bump! and was glad to discover I was still in one piece! I gathered up my parachute and went to the edge of the forest and covered it over to hide it. Before doing this, I tore a piece out as a souvenir, which I still have, by telling the Germans that it was my handkerchief. Then I went in the direction of where I had seen the other parachute come down. Calling out, got a reply, then met up with the bomb-aimer. We took his parachute to the forest and buried it as well. We then walked across the field and came to a small road, where we followed it, then came to a 'T' junction with one direction marked 'Welden', not knowing at the time this was 2 1/2 miles from where the Halifax crashed.

At the same junction, there were some houses. On one, I can remember a large advertising sign 'coca-cola'. From another house we heard voices, so we turned around and returned to the field and forest, where we walked south until daylight and hid there until dark. I had my escape compass and map, but on the map we could not find 'Welden', but we knew we were somewhere south of Augsburg or Ulm.

We headed south at night and hid in the forest by day. After about three days we came to a railway, then followed it southwards, but the weather was getting very wet, but at least we were able to get a drink from the puddles on the road. We had nowhere to go to get dry and the going was getting harder. We dumped our heavy wet flying gear to make the walking easier. We walked around the villages to avoid capture. It was very scary when approaching houses as most of them had dogs and from the sound of them, of the larger variety. A couple of times we heard German people talking and walking towards us. We just sunk into the side of the road and they passed by.

After a week, we walked into a place which we decided was quite large, so the plan was to risk being caught to find out exactly where we were. We walked right into a railway station and found the place was called Kempton. There were a few people about and it was very dark, so it was quite easy to hide in the shadows and watch what was going on. Once we did think of trying to get into a railway truck, then thought we would be worse off as we did not know where it was going. Whilst hiding on Kempton railway station we heard a lot of talking and laughing coming from a nearby hut. We did not understand a word that was said, but realised that it was some sort of canteen where the railway workers were having something to eat, which made us feel more hungry, as we were very short of food.

In October 1943, 8 prisoners were called out of our huts and taken to the guard room, where we realized that we all had one thing in common, we were all survivors of the Munich raid. We were told that by orders of the German High Command, we were all to be taken to Munich and shown the damage we had done, by the attack on the city and then all be shot, which is not a very nice feeling, but being outnumbered by guards with guns, there was nothing that could be done about the situation we found ourselves in. The train journey to Munich took 2 days. We

The reason we were so short of food was that the bomb-aimer did not have his emergency rations or escape kit with him, consequently I had to share mine with him. After a short while, all the workers left the hut, leaving a small light on. They were quite noisy and easy to dodge as I suppose they did not realise they were being watched! After watching for a while and with no-one about, I slipped in to the hut and went through a few bags and found some dry brown bread and a piece of large sausage, the size of which I had never seen before, but at least it was food.

We retreated from Kempton by the same track and proceeded as usual to walk clockwise around until we picked up the railway again. This took us all night and as it was getting light we heard a train, and then there was a dense bit of woodland and a small stream, so we could hide and get some water to drink. Water was sometimes more of a problem than food. Now we knew where we were, we could study the silk map I had and found Kempton quite easily on it. At last we knew exactly where we were, but did not know where we had come from! We shared the bread and sausage, but there was onion in it, which I do not like, but was glad to eat it. The idea then was to make for Switzerland. Where we were hiding, there were a few empty apple trees, but we did find about half a dozen on the ground, which all helped.

The bomb-aimer had had enough by this time and wanted to give himself up, but I was afraid that if he did the Germans would soon find me and from the map, Switzerland was not very far, so I persuaded him to stay and continue for a little longer. The next night was very wet and we did not make much progress; our feet were getting very sore and swollen with walking in wet suede flying boots. We were generally very uncomfortable, nothing to shave with and not even a comb between us; but still kept going, but more slowly. The next night we reached Immenstadt. We decided to walk through the place, as going around looked impossible with mountains everywhere. We were nearly through as we waited until it was quiet, when suddenly from behind a house on the corner, a couple of German Soldiers appeared; they shone a torch on us. We could not understand what they were saying, but from their gestures it was obvious we had to go with them. We ended up at the police station where we were searched and put into a cell. We were given some food and hot drinks and a dry bed to lie on, which was most welcome after nine days without. After being captured, I never associated or spoke to the bomb-aimer again, as I still feel he let me and the RAF down very badly, by not carrying his emergency rations or escape kit.

The soldiers and police took our watches and my compass. The lady interpreter had my silk maps. We were kept at Immenstadt for a couple of days and were certain most of the villagers came to have a look at us through the peep-hole in the door. With two armed guards, we were taken in the back of a lorry to Kempton. The lorry was powered by a wood-burning gas producer. From Kempton, we went by train to the interrogation centre Dulagluft, near Frankfurt. From Frankfurt we were sent to a prisoner of war camp right up in the Baltic coast of East Prussia. It was Stalagluft 6 Heydekrug; it was a camp for RAF NCO Air-crew.

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we were taken to an airfield near Munich and greeted by other survivors from 2 other POW camps, making a total of 31 RAF air-crew survivors from 2 bombing raids on Munich, 6th-7th September and 2nd-3rd October. After being paraded twice around Munich by bus with even armed guards sitting on the roof, we were taken to the opera house where the head of the German Air Force, Hermann Goering was supposed to address us. After waiting some considerable time, he failed to turn up and much to our relief an Officer announced that we were to be taken back to our POW camps. I could never find out why this was done to us, nor have I ever heard of this happening to any other air-crew survivors from bombing raids on German cities. I have done extensive research in England and Germany, but have found no official records.

When the Russians advanced in the summer of 1944, we were moved to Thorn, Poland Stalag 357. It was mainly a mixed nationality camp. We were not there long, as the Russian advance continued. The Germans moved us out by marching in a very long column and then to a railway station, where we were loaded into cattle trucks: just about standing room only. There was straw on the floor, to lie on if room could be made. The armed guards were in the middle protected by a barbed wire barrier. There were no toilet facilities for us, but the train did stop quite often and those in need were allowed out under guards with bayonets fixed. All the food we had was watery soup and dry bread. After a few days we arrived at Stalag 355 Fallingbomel north of Hanover. This was a very large camp. I was lucky, as I was put into a hut whilst others were in large tents, which was very cold in the winter.

In the spring of 1945, we knew the British were advancing by the secret radio that was in the camp. On the 11th April, the Germans marched us out and in a north easterly direction. We then got caught between the retreating Germans and the advancing British. All hell was let loose, with bombing and shell fire, we were caught with nowhere to go except the woods, as the Germans just left us to our fate and they were gone. After a couple of days of heavy fighting there was no sleep and no food. There was a terrific amount of noise from gun carriers and tanks. A few of us hid in a shell hole or bomb crater with fir tree branches put on top. Early on the morning of the 17th April, a very large tank stopped right by our hideout, and opened fire which was deafening. When it stopped firing we all got out of the hole. The tank commander made us put our hands up, but when he realised we were British POW's we were given food and drink, cigarettes for the ones who smoked and some clothes as we were cold and frightened. A Corporal gave me his jacket, and before I handed it in I removed the Desert Rats Badge as a souvenir, which I still have.

Our position was marked on the map by the tank crew, and we were told to stay where we were and we would be picked up later in the day, which we were and then taken back to the prison camp, which was now occupied by the British Army and looked after very well. We had a nice warm shower and a razor to have a shave, which I still use till this day. After a few days we were taken to an Army Camp, smartened up in Army Private uniforms and flown back to England in a transport Dakota, 36 standing up, holding the sides. Back in England the RAF changed our uniforms and issued appropriate ranks and badges and we were sent on leave, arriving home on the 27th April 1945. The Germans, right up to the end, wanted to keep the RAF Prisoners, as they were sure they were going to win the war and we were used as forced labour to rebuild the bombed cities.

Written April 1988.

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