

LETTERS HOME

Flt.Sgt. John Thomas Jones (1800039)

July 1942 – February 1945



The following edited transcripts are taken from letters written by Flt.Sgt. John Thomas Jones to his wife during flight training and operational duties in 1942, 1943 and 1945, up until his Lancaster Bomber was reported missing on 18th February 1945. Flt. Sgt. J.T. Jones was a Bomb Aimer with Bomber Command, 626 Squadron at Wickenby.

The edited letters and information notes were written by his daughter, Carol Ann Jones in June 2017.

“My father was born in Clydach Vale, South Wales, on 12th January 1918. He was the eldest of five children and his father worked at Cwmbran Pit in the Rhondda. He joined the Metropolitan Police Force aged 19 and moved to Hornsey Police Station in North London where he met my mother, Lilian May Hill. My father served with the Met between 1937 and 1941.

The first letter, dated 18th December 1941 is from my mother’s brother Fred who writes from RAF C. Squadron in Hereford”:

“So, Jack, you have received your papers at last. I don’t know whether to say that I am glad to hear it or not. I can guess what Lily said and I suppose I should say the same, because if I don’t I shall only get told off next time I go home.”

(In the early years of the War the Police Force was a reserved occupation; they were required to keep order, protect life and property, lend a hand at every sort of job, encourage, help and rescue citizens under the grimmest conditions. Due to their increased responsibilities reserve groups had to be mobilised, made up of ex-police pensioners, special constables and War Reserve Constables.)

The first letter I can find from my father during RAF training is dated 8th July 1942, from B Squadron, Prince Albert Road, London NW8:

“Sorry for not writing before, been awfully busy. We were engaged all day Monday getting kit etc. didn’t get to bed until 12.30am Tuesday morning.”

On 15th July 1942 he was talking about inoculations, being confined to barracks, and:

“...after leaving the phone on Wednesday morning I went into a coffee shop and ate 3 cheese rolls 4 doughnuts and 2 currant buns with 2 large teas.”

By Friday 30th July 1942 my father is at B Squadron in Ludlow, Shropshire:

“It’s real camp life here ... tents, straw mattresses, ground sheet (my cape) no telephone within 2 miles, no cigarettes – could you oblige with a couple now and then only for 3 weeks. Ta!”

2nd August 1942

“This is Sunday – what a day it is, pouring with rain and the wigwams are all choked up with the occupants. I finished duty at 2.00pm today, was in the Sergeants Mess with 7 other chaps – we caned all the spare ‘grub’ there. I also filled myself up with raisins... Monday morning and still raining. It makes no difference though we still wash and shave in the open. I don’t bother to wash at 6.00am in the mornings for breakfast parade. While I am here I shall live just like a tramp (your pop’s ambition, and I’ve got it). They’re not really fussy about one shaving oneself here except on Friday morning which is Squadron Parade day – once a week...

Last night that chap and I went to the town of Ludlow ... we tried to get cigarettes, there were none; we tried beer – sold out; we tried cafes – only ‘spam’ sandwiches and weak tea. So we went to one of the two cinemas there – what luck, it was a film I had missed, cost 2/6.”

One or two of the chaps here are married and their wives, who live fairly near, come to visit them – blimey, they had to sleep in churches through the shortage of ‘digs’ in the town. I think that’s silly. Fancy leaving one’s wife all night in a church while one is sleeping in camp – no night out passes are granted now as the OC is fed up with men cluttering the town up with relatives.

That’s enough about my doings for now, because what I do is the same day in and day out, living roughly and crudely. I may add that when one goes to the lavatory here one has lots of company – there’s no fear of disease though, a thorough medical exam is held every four days.”

4th August 1942

“Yesterday (Monday) it rained like hell – we were wallowing and working in knee boots – mud and slush all over the camp. It was better today, we went for a swim in the river, a part of which is set off for the RAF only – no women and no civvys. It was cold spring water, but I find I can stand it a little longer than I used to – anyway the Pilot Officer in Charge of our Squadron makes us don plimsolls and run like hell in our trunks for half a mile or so to warm up – then we do PT (Physical Training). On the way back from the river we passed a farm where there were some horses – real beauties, and I asked the P. Officer if I could ride one. After a bit of haggling he

consented – I chose one and went bareback for about a couple of miles – it was lovely.”

(My father would ride the miners’ pit ponies as a child growing up in South Wales. He wanted to join the Met’s Mounted Police Branch but was too tall.)

9th August 1942

“Just written a letter off to Tom. I wonder how he is taking service life, I’ll soon find out when he replies. Mum sent me some cigarettes and sweets last Friday; her back is still painful. I wish she would see a doctor, although the local one is pretty useless.”

15th August 1942 (a 17 page letter)

“Tom’s a terror, for some unholy reason he has changed from the opportunity of going into the Fleet Air Arm to be a STOKER. God knows why, I don’t. Damned if I would, never did like hard work. Some chaps here have changed their minds too, some are remustering as draughtsmen, others electricians etc. and they haven’t even commenced the flying course yet...”

I wonder when I shall be able to relax and not do exams and medicals. From 19 years of age all I seem to have done is exams and medicals – medicals and exams.”

(My father’s brother, Tom, was called up aged 18, and became a stoker on motor torpedo boats. He ended the war as a petty officer and was posted to Germany. He did not return home until 1946.)

19th August 1942

“...I have to write you a letter in-between the Maths lecture, the Gas lecture and the Morse lecture...I told you where I am going, didn’t I, well here it is again. It is the Initial Training Wing (ITW) at St. Andrews, Scotland. That’s all I know at present.”

22nd August 1942 – Rusacks Marine Hotel, St. Andrews, Fife, Scotland

“Well here I am in Scotland with a hell of a lot of work ahead of me. There’ll be little enough time to write to anyone outside you... and my family...”

It is not at all bad here...I share a room with just one other chap, hot and cold water laid on, spring beds and clean sheets, three course dinners (soup, meat and 2 veg and dessert). Nice clean surroundings and a hell of a lot of uniform cleaning and polishing to do. But I have no complaints, yet. The sea comes practically up to the door of this hotel...

In your last letter you wanted to know if I could remuster to something else – I could ... but no, I’ll either fly as air-crew or if in the event of failing I shall go in the tank corps, or anything else where there is an engine.

It seems to me that there has come to the RAF a new system, there seems to be a damned lot of drill, cleaning and being ultra-smart when off duty. For example, a ceremonial belt is worn by us on all ceremonial occasions and when off duty – it has

to be blanched lily white and we also have to blanco our white flashes. We are always on the go, whether on or off duty, always something to do...

When I think of the (my) family I feel happy and contented to know they are alright – thank God.”

(My father’s parents and youngest sister, Morfydd, lived at Greenhithe in Kent on the Thames Estuary in the direct path of nightly German bombers.)

23rd August 1942

“In this Sports (Trial) I came 2nd in the 100yds, 1st in the 220yds and 3rd in the quarter mile – not so dusty after leaving professional training in running about 7 years behind me. The officers in charge of athletics will not allow a man to run in more than one race if it can be avoided, so they have decided that on the day of the Inter Squadron Sports (that’s Friday next) I am to represent No 1 Squadron in the 220yds and reserve for the 100yds; so I have had strict orders to train every night this coming week and not to be allowed in the swimming pool. There are 12 of us in No 1 Squadron in training and some of the chaps don’t like the no swimming part of it – but it can be understood as swimming and running never did mix – two different muscle requirements – one hardens one, the other makes one supple...

“This place (St. Andrews) has got its fair share of Polish soldiers stationed here – aren’t they cocky! I may say that there is no love lost between us. Even our superiors tell us that we can salute or not (please ourselves in other words) to the Polish officers. Very few chaps here training for air crew have anything to do with the local girls, so the Polish soldiers are seen with Scotch girls all over the place – there are quite a lot of Poles and Scotch girls married too. I have great difficulty in understanding what some of the local inhabitants are talking about. Fraser, my roommate, is Scotch so I use him as an interpreter.”

The following letter is written in response to my mother’s suggestion that she could travel to St. Andrews to see my father. He very politely pointed out that he had no free time at all!

27th August 1942

“A typical day is – rise at 6.00am, breakfast at 6.45am, parade at 7.30am, to march to the University for 2 hrs. Instruction and Navigation to commence at 8.00am. From 10.00am to 11.00am Morse. From 11.00am to 12.30pm Aircraft Recognition. Dinner at 1.00pm to 1.30pm. Parade at 1.40pm; Gas Instruction from 2pm to 3pm. Drill from 3pm to 3.30pm. From 3.30pm to 4pm PT. 4pm to 5pm Principles of Flight instruction. 5pm to 6pm on one day is Engines, the next Law and the next Armament. Tea is at 6.15pm. At 7pm there is a class for Hygiene and Sanitation. They say it’s voluntary, woe betide you if you don’t attend – voluntary my eye. You can leave the hotel at 8pm if you want to, but must book in before 10pm...

Believe me when I say that the Air Crew Training Syllabus is much more intensive now than it’s ever been during the last three years...

You know when Paddy went away... well he is now only an AC1 and still in training for wireless operator/air gunner's course. All air crew are doing the same length of time in study. It's a hell of a lot to do... it involves such a lot of study in the hellishly small amount of time that is your own.

When I come home for my seven days I shall be screwy – all my mind is full of is such things as 35° 3'E – 30° 40' 20'W and d-d-dah-dah-dah-d-dit. Then in lectures that is, by the right quick march!! Then comes aircraft recognition seeping thro' with name, type, construction, engine and armament, wing span, wing area and length of fuselage. Then comes the dear old 'Doc' talking about diseases – damn! I thought I knew them all – must go through it again I suppose.”

29th August 1942

“...The Sports was not run on Friday but Saturday. I took the 100yds and 2nd in the 220yds. One particular officer at the sports, one of the judges, asked me if I had done any professional running. I said no (white lie, for the sake of No 1 Sqdn.) and he said my style was very much like the professional type – phew! You see.... If anyone has done professional running (that's where one fills in a form and receives money as a prize) he is not allowed to run in amateur sports meetings of any kind – in or out of the Services. That's enough of the sports meeting, except I am pleased to add that No.1 Squadron won...”

Pass my sincere wishes to your parents and Pat and family. By the way tell your Pop that we DO MARCH 140 to the minute, no less and no more. He wouldn't believe me when I told him last time. Over 2 steps a second, some travelling eh!... But do we look smart – do we.”

2nd September 1942

“Since the last letter of mine I have been quite busy. I played rigger twice, soccer once and now some fool of a PT Corporal has been coaching me and has placed me in the Sqdn. Soccer team to play centre-half, and in the Water Polo team to play back – I swim a little better in salt water tho' – but I'm still no good, but I'll stop them somehow, even if I drown half a dozen. I swam almost a mile the other morning – it surprised me – must be the exercise I get, improved my wind no end. I can quite see why we get such a lot of PT here, we have such a lot of mental work to do that if we did not have some sports we'd go nuts.”

The last letter from St. Andrews was dated 13th September 1942. Then nothing until the following letter from Perth.

6th December 1942

“I'm sorry about the switching of the wedding date from 14th to the 21st of Dec. It is not my fault that this alteration occurred; Ground Defence which is usually done by the RAF Regiment is now our responsibility so instead of 3 weeks here it is now 4. Please try to arrange as much as possible. I have now 12 1/2 hours Instructional Flying in and 15 minutes solo. It's grand!...”

PS Tell Pat I am doing a short course on the Link Trainer – tell him I think it's a marvellous piece of machinery. Better than actual flying.”

(The Link Trainer was developed by Fairey Aviation where my mother's eldest brother, Pat, worked during the war)

(My mother had to change their wedding date four times. It did finally take place on 21st December 1942 in Crouch Hill, North London, and my parents honeymooned in a flat over a relative's shoe shop in Guildford. My paternal grandparents had one day's notice to travel to London for the wedding, and Morfydd was a bridesmaid with a hired dress. My mother's three brothers were unable to attend: Pat was in Scotland, Jack was in Malaya and Fred was in Aden.

My father's remaining two sisters, Doris and Marjorie, were both nurses. Doris in Dartford [nursing RAF burn victims] and Marjorie at St. Thomas's in London. Tom was by now serving in the Navy.)

Between 14th and 26th January 1943 Churchill and Roosevelt met in Casablanca to plan the Allied European strategy for the next phase of World War Two. One of the many decisions made at this conference was confirmation of an intensified bombing offensive against Germany, now to be undertaken by both RAF Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force, based in Britain.

The role of Bomber Command was spelled out in what became known as the Casablanca directive. Harris was told: *'Your primary object will be the progressive destruction of the German military industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their armed resistance is fatally weakened.'*

On 27th January 1943 USAAF bomber aircraft made their first raid on Germany.

My father's letters written in the first half of 1943 represent the lowest point in his RAF training. My father writes a great deal about money, income tax and allowances. He was also trying to think of any scam he could to take weekend leave, which involved travel, (bus, tube and train) time and money he didn't have. Bombing raids continued throughout this period. On one occasion in London he was trying to get a late bus back to the underground when an air raid begins. There are no buses and he has to take a taxi (3/- as opposed to 3d.) and the train begins its journey in complete darkness.

Reading the letters about my impending arrival it also makes me realise that neither of my parents were prepared for a baby, having had no married time together, let alone as parents.

18th January 1943 - RAF Heaton Park, Manchester

"I will try to come down this weekend. I suppose you cannot have next Sunday off – never mind if you can't, because I shall pop down about 7pm Saturday and will return here from Euston at 12 midnight on Sunday. The fare is 37/8d return. I don't suppose I will be able to do it every week but whenever I can I will..."

By the way...the RAF authorities (God bless them) have decided that I and numerous other chaps, who wanted to be pilots, will be best suited as air-Bombers, they are the chaps who do the bombing of the targets and various other jobs – needless to say 50% of the keenness of flying I have lost.”

(My mother was working at the War Office, including fire watch up to July/August 1943 and I suspect weekends weren't always free.)

25th January 1943

“Arrived back okay about 6.45am, had to catch the 41 bus at the Broadway to Turnpike Lane Tube Stn. – was okay from there – met the other chap as arranged reached the ‘Park at above time and scaled the wall nearest the huts where we live (or rather exist) in time for breakfast & parade.

It has been raining all day today – damned miserable. If it keeps on we shall all probably be home on sick leave.”

28th January 1943

“Most of the chaps here are amazing in their attitude towards carrying on in any of the other capacities other than pilot. They keep dodging work and turn up at all times for parades. I shall see this course through but if they keep me here, or at any other camp, doing nothing at all I shall seriously consider doing something else.”

29th January 1943

“It is Friday morning at 9.45am & I am writing this letter whilst in the Navigation Class. I can't be bothered to study Navigation these days... While I sit here writing this letter to my wife I have three maps, table plotter and Navigational Computer in front of me, but do you think I can become interested again... not in a life time, I don't seem to worry whether I see them again or not, deadly isn't it, shakes me rigid to think how grim my views on the RAF are becoming. I continually think of schemes of dodging all work that appears to come my way. I am not alone in my views & feelings either, the only chaps who do as they are told are the chaps who are going thro' the course as pilots. They are too windy of being put off it.”

2nd February 1943

“Another day & what a day! Raining again. My cold seems a little better today – should see the amount of chaps who report sick every morning up here, and no wonder, with all the water in the country falling on this particular spot. I went to the cinema last night but instead of seeing “The Road to Morocco” we saw “San Francisco” instead, not bad....

I started to write this letter at 9.30am today and it is now 5.30pm what wasteful days we spend here. After the cinema last night (which cost me 1/- by the way) I got some chips & ate them on the way back to camp. I think I'll end now & spend another 1/- on another film, anything so as not to stay in this blasted dump.”

10th February 1943

"I arrived back here at 7pm last night – missed all the SPs and then I paraded at 9.00am this morning and at 1.30pm this afternoon, & answered my name on both occasions & not a word was said to me about my absence. The other chaps answered for me on Mon. & Tues. so I can with safety say everything is okay – no fatigues or anything – lucky eh...."

(The letters are now about waiting, hoping for a posting.)

17th February 1943

"There are two postings a week here & one never knows when one is claimed to go away – it all happens in about 36-48 hrs. and then away. But I shall try my best to let you know if it happens to me – usually on Mondays or Wednesdays... Please forgive me if I sound dismal, but I am in a kind of despondent mood. We parade & march around here from day to day & damned if we do anything or seem to get anywhere. Useless waste of manpower."

24th February 1943 - My presence becomes known!

"I do hope you are feeling alright, after your mention of the knitting it seems pretty conclusive doesn't it. I don't quite know what my feelings are, what are yours? I do & I don't, I keep thinking about how to keep a child & plan a home at the same time, rather a stiff proposition isn't it.

I think I have 'had it' as far as having the weekend is concerned. I was not on the Wednesday's draft but may be on the weekend draft...

Another point... and please do not get huffy about it, if I come down do you think you could reimburse my fare (28/-) because I got so little for this fortnight's pay. That's mainly the reason I did not chance coming home last weekend. I went to see that film "One Day of War in Russia" last night – 2nd time I've been to the cinema since I saw you last – in the 9ds...

Got a letter from my mum the same time as yours, Tom keeps sending home for money to enable him to come home & then cigarettes – he must be spending like hell. Mum's thinking of taking a job – it helps I suppose, but I don't care for it much, she's worked hard enough, about time she got things a lot easier."

(“One Day of War in Russia” was a 20min. film on British Pathe News showing scenes filmed by 160 Soviet cameramen in the course of a single fighting day. The film can be viewed on YouTube.)

2nd March 1943

"It is now 10.40pm and all today I have been working in a timber shed, cutting & sorting wood. Supposed to be air-crew!

It is now 3.00pm on Wednesday afternoon. This morning I, with Garland & over 100 others were detailed for more labour work at 9.00am at the same place as I was at

yesterday. So – Garland, myself and 1 or 2 others dodged the trucks that were to convey us to the labour camp and went into town.”

4th March 1943

“The discipline here is tightening up somewhat, treating the chaps just like kids – some of the NCOs here are not even fit to clean roads. I’m not being cynical... just stating facts, it’s the equivalent of a concentration camp.”

7th March 1943

“I had a dream last Friday night... and was I worried – what a hell of a state I got into. In this dream I was planning to marry a Miss L.M. Hill but my wife Mrs. J.T. Jones wouldn’t let me, you took a dual role & I was in love with you both. You both kept changing all the time, when I thought I was speaking to Miss Hill & planning this marriage she turned and called me a fool or something & said we had been married 100 years or for a long time anyway, in the end I ran away from you both & joined the Girl Guides or something like that. Shan’t eat any more fish & chips before getting straight into bed...”

I heard that the tube affair was at Bethnal Green, pretty rotten eh!”

(On the evening of 3rd March 1943 a large number of people emerged from a cinema just after an alert had sounded. Many of them moved at once to the nearby Bethnal Green Tube Station and, as they were crowding in, a heavy burst of anti-aircraft gunfire or rockets made people hurry. There was no great panic; just a lot of people trying to get into the station and pressing forward. The top staircase led straight down; then there was a landing and a right-angled turn. At the bottom of this staircase a woman tripped and fell. Pressure from behind made others fall on to her. Thus an impassable heap of fallen people was quickly formed. In a short time there was a mass of jammed people from the bottom to the top of the staircase. When police came to the rescue they found it impossible to extricate people as they were locked together in a solid mass. 173 people lost their lives and 50 were injured.)

9th March 1943

“Dos is in bed at her hospital with tonsillitis & a septic throat so I must try and go down, do you mind, I mean if you mind coming home with me...”

30th March 1943

“Yesterday I was in front of the Sqdn Leader for the charge of being absent from that parade; also an SP spoke out of turn to me, and I saw him off so I also answered for that. The officer fined me 2 days’ pay, that’s for leaving early on Thursday and not being back on Sunday. In conjunction with that I have to do 14 days C.C. Don’t worry about it sweet, I can do it and hope I can save a little whilst on it. After the completion of this punishment and if I am still here I am going to ask for 7 days, and be persistent about it, keep asking for it.”

(SP stands for Service Police! CC stands for Confined to Camp)

31st March 1943

"I am now almost 3 days passed my 14 days C.C. only another 11 days to go - & then I will celebrate by going to the 9d. cinema in town. The other chap in my hut, McLean, had to do 5 days C.C. too; so I had company to start with. It's not bad really. I am now on Station Fine Picquet, so I shan't parade in full kit again until 6.00pm tomorrow night..."

One thing about being Confined to Camp I get bags of food, so won't die of hunger."

(There was not much mail in April but some leave.)

2nd May 1943

"The world is against me not two minutes have I had since Friday night. There was a draft for pilots to Canada and I was placed on reserve with 25 others. I was 9th on the list; 5 of the blokes on the draft went sick so 5 reserves went in their place. I was 'sweating' (common word that) on my being taken, if I had been taken I would have been hard pushed to write to you & mum about it. Anyway it didn't happen."

4th May 1943

"Yesterday (Mon.) I was doing duty at Rochdale for their Wings for Victory week. I felt just like a teacher. Outside their Town Hall they had a Spitfire and I and another cadet took turns at explaining to the public the various controls attached to it. On Wednesday I shall be doing the same only on the Lancaster bomber this time. Very few air-crew cadets are seen in Rochdale so we are accepted almost like first class "Gen" men. They gave us lots of tea & free rides on the buses. Anyway it made a change from the 'Park. A very small rumour started this morning about a 48hrs pass this weekend, but there is every possibility of being put in a different flight again before the weekend so I have no hopes of getting it."

6th May 1943

"A lot of chaps are being posted to Ludlow again – if it is my misfortune to go there again I shall create merry hell; 10 months in the RAF & not finished the course yet – bad show, eh' sweet. I should be flying on 'Ops' now. The weather at present is very nice but I have been unable to find an open air baths yet – like looking for a needle in a haystack."

12th May 1943

"It's been raining since yesterday and the ground around the huts is in terrible condition, just the right conditions for pneumonia etc. No word yet of a draft. If I cannot think of anything else to get the pass with this weekend I'll try the line about having to get my Income Tax in order – it may work, then again – it mightn't. What a liar! There are 4 of us in the room now – one is attempting to play the piano (that's McLean) Lambert is 'genning' up on U-boat strategy – Finlayson is trying to sleep in an old rocking chair. All of us a little browned off – all been here for the last 17 weeks... We didn't go swimming today because it will be crowded with the Navy 'fellahs', 'most awful crowd, damned bad show.'

Had a bob's worth at the Odeon, Manchester, last night, saw 'The Silver Fleet' & 'East Side of Heaven' not bad."

20th May 1943

"..on the afternoon parade we were informed that we are on the draft to Canada as air-bombers.."

23rd May 1943

"I had a letter from Mum at the same time as yours; Gravesend received an air-raid the other night also Swanscombe – kept Doris up all night on casualties. If you do decide to go down next Sunday I think mum would like it very much..."

I am not fed up... only I do want this course finished and done with, then I can start work in earnest whether as air-bomber or pilot. If I am able to get stockings at all, in silk or rayon – the size is 10 isn't it, let me know if possible...

Promise me you'll show the youngster my photograph and tell he or she who it is – I shouldn't like it if when I picked it up it would cry like Pat did that day."

(The following is the last letter before the Canada letters begin in June. In a previous letter my father was told the delay was due to 'shipping'.)

27th May 1943

"Nothing regarding the draft was mentioned today – I've a feeling it may happen before next Monday tho'."

May 1943 is referred to as 'Black May' in the Battle of the Atlantic campaign when the German U-boat arm (*U-Bootwaffe*) suffered high casualties with few allied ships sunk; it is considered a turning point in the Battle of the Atlantic.

My father would have travelled on a troopship to Halifax, Nova Scotia, in Canada. The journey would have taken approximately ten days.

The following letters span the period June to October 1943 during my father's flight training in Canada.

27th June 1943 - Monkton, New Brunswick, Canada

"Today being Sunday we are now free after church parade which was this morning at 10am. I shall go to a cinema show tonight I think. We are waiting here to go on a course, probably pilots, I don't think they are going to train very many more air bombers. I shan't attempt to get stockings here, they aren't too good. I'll wait until I go to my next station.

As I told you in the airgraphs we had an uneventful passage and arrived at this station on the second Sunday after leaving England. We wear summer kit here like that issued to Freddie and on some of the days we need it. I wish you were here to share the chocs. eggs, milk and fruit with me...you could really make a pig of yourself. No blackout here either, bags of light, the cars of course travel on the right hand side of the road...

It may work out that we'll be in England by Xmas – but highly improbable – anyway the New Year should see us back.

I do hope everything is quiet over there – we chaps feel right out of things here.

I am getting the hang of Canadian money now: 4 dollars and 43 cents is equal to 20/- in English money. But the cost of living here is higher than in peace-time England.

An apple or orange costs 7 cents, that's equal to 3 1/2d approx.. Cigarettes (usually Players or Sweet Corporal) cost 35 cents for 25 – that's not bad, about 1s 5 ½ d, milk is 5 cents half-pint (2 ½ d).

The girls I've seen walking in town, to me, dress rather childishly with socks, short frocks and ribbons in the hair. They (the people, especially young ones) use expressions like "hep" which means "get informed on" "jive" (kind of jazz) "alligators", "buddle bunny", "beetle" (all mean jitterbugs).

Tell your Pop that the beer here would make him a teetotaller for the rest of his life, I tried one drink one night --- no more, it's like strong lemonade. I can now understand why our beer gets the Yanks and Canadians over there drunk quickly. For your information.. I was not sea-sick – too busy eating. Would like very much to fly back when the time comes.

The Atlantic ... is a pretty colossal effort – should object very much to swimming in it....

Tomorrow, Monday 28.6.43, I am going into town to the hospital to give up a pint of blood, the very best grade if I might say so. This will be the 4th since the outbreak of war. Here in Canada after giving 3 you can wear a Red Cross Blood Donor's pin...

After the war's over I shall probably be sent on a Police refresher course at the school; will I ever leave studying and settle down to an easy chair ...

I do hope the youngster will be able to eat solids before I return – because I read somewhere that the poor father has to eat all the wasted soft foods if baby doesn't want it – fine outlook... and me a member of the Cannibal Club."

3rd August 1943

"If Fowler does (or rather if he has been down) give him my regards. He's rather like an old woman, but if he's still in the police when I rejoin he might be helpful, because if everything comes out alright I think I'll try and get me a permanent place in the CID. For some reason or other civilian clothes seem very nice to me now, so please don't spend all our money sweet, save a few pounds for me to get a smashing suit at the end of the war...

Lately...I have been doing some sketching around the camp here in my spare time. We go to classes of course but they finish at 4.30pm. When we are putting our home

together sweet I have some ideas for sketches that I think I'd like, you know, on nice white cardboard with a sheet of glass and some passé-partout, would you prefer that to ordinary pictures. Not too many of course."

August 1943 - (not dated due to the fact it was written on Friday 13th – too suspicious)

"I am still waiting to go to another station to complete my course – they are very full tho' and we are waiting for some to finish. ...I hear that Clark Gable was in operations over Germany – he's only been in the Air Corps about 9 to 10 months. I've been in the RAF 13 months. Don't know what a jerry looks like... I average about 3 films a week here... can't afford to do too much in the way of entertainment on my present pay. I get about 75cents a day (approx. 21/s a week)."

11th August 1943 – Picton, Ontario

"Of late I have been receiving quite a lot of letters from you and the family. I understand that Mum and Morf were coming to see you Sunday the 5th – did they? In her letter Marj tells me that Basil (Ludlow's son – the pub next to us) had his discharge from the RAF and was claimed by the Army. A little grim that, being a private after some time spent as a Sergeant Observer in the RAF, don't you think..?"

24th August 1943

"This camp is OK and I am quite enjoying it. No food worries, plenty of it. Weather's okay too. I've a lot to learn here, but I shall get down to it, and then the sooner it is finished the sooner I shall be able to see you again sweet. The lounge where I am writing this letter is a nice affair, red carpeting and light yellow grained furniture...."

I am having a 48hr pass this coming weekend and I intend to slip down to Buffalo (USA) and see Niagra Falls on the way down. I shall tell you about it next week. Wish you could do it with me sweet. About the middle of August I have another 48hr pass due me; shall see New York then, hitch-hike most of the way probably..."

25th August 1943

"The weekends at Moncton we usually spent at a place about 20 miles outside a place called Ponte-du-Cheyne, quite a stretch of beach and the ocean to swim in. We hitch-hiked out and back because it saved a few dollars. We would sling a ball about for a while, then swim, and in-between times eat hot dogs or hamburgers with soft drinks. At the close of day we returned to Moncton and finished off the evening with steak, tomatoes, chips, peas, apple pie (or tart) and coffee. Not bad eh – sweet, excuse the shaky 'e' in sweet, but my cigarette just fell off the table."

I am writing with another Parker pen I picked up over here ... got 2 now, God knows how many I shall have by the time I return. The only fault out here is the lack of the 'ready' otherwise one could get quite a number of useful things."

I have still 2 half-crowns, a penny and a half-penny left from my English currency and the more I look at them the stronger they appeal to me.... I can just imagine your face... if we go in a restaurant together over there and I start hunting around for a 'juke-box' to put a five cent piece into to get some jive music. Some more slang for you to think over sweet. Next time you see a tall manly object you should call him Mr. 'Finest by-fine'(?). Rather grim expression is the one about a girl with a bad figure – 'bag with a sag'...."





30th August 1943

"...I have quite a lot to tell you about my weekend leave so will get right on with it. Lambert and I left camp about 2pm on Friday 27th and reached Toronto at 6.30pm. After fixing up a bed each at the YMCA we had some tea and went on a free ticket to a radio show, that lasted 2 ½ hours. Then some supper and bed around midnight. Breakfast the next morning at 8am and then a swim, after which we had a good lunch (roast beef). We then took a steamer across Lake Ontario to Niagra Falls, reaching there about 6.30pm. It's quite a sight but we did not linger but crossed the border into the States. We arrived in Buffalo City (in the state of New York) about 8pm. After something to eat we were introduced to a family, the man's name was John Sweeney (Irish eh!). His wife died some years ago and he lives with 2 of his sisters and mother. He has a youngster about 5 years old. Nice people. At about 10.30pm he was all for showing us the town. We went all around the city in his car. We had a meal about midnight in an all-night restaurant and then he insisted on showing us the run of night clubs. We covered quite a few and about 2am we were in the Havana Casino – some joint. About 2.45am we left and went to the best one in town – the Chez Ami. The floor show was in progress when we got in. During the tour I danced (rather shuffled) with one or two girls who were escorted by American soldiers. It was just an act of courtesy to make us feel at home, don't be jealous sweet. The Americans at home are much better than the ones you know at home there. At the Chez Ami we bumped into Garland, remember him sweet, I roomed with him at St. Andrews. Small world. He and the other room-mate of mine at St. Andrew's (Frazer) are off the course now. Both are returning to civvy street. Well, Garland was invited

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by John Sweeney to stay the night with us at his place. At the last night club which, by the way sweet, reminded me very much of the Café de Paris (pronounced Patee) that was bombed in Leicester Square, with its great mirrors and changing colour scheme. We, that is Lambert, Garland and I danced once or twice (John Sweeney is 53yrs old, past dancing, he reckons) and at 4am we all went down to the negro quarter for hamburgers and coffee.

To continue my narrative, after the hamburgers and coffee we left for home where at 5.15am we crawled into bed, me on my own, Garland and Lambert in a double affair. We were called at 9am (we asked to be) with tea and toast. And breakfast consisted of orange juice, eggs, bacon, toast and marmalade with 5 cups of tea. By the way sweet we had some champagne the night before that left a taste in my mouth, don't like it much. We looked around a bit more after that and after a light lunch at noon it was time to start back to camp. So after thanking John Sweeney and his family for giving us a damned good time we left in John Sweeney's car (he drove us all the way back to the Falls some 12 miles, where we said cheerio to him and promised to see him and the family again.) We had another look at the Falls and then hitch-hiked back to Toronto in a car driven by an American who stood us our supper when we arrived at 8pm. We caught the 9.30pm train from Toronto and back to camp at 1.45am. Tired but with a contented feeling of having succeeded in getting to the places we started out for.

I fly nearly every day sweet in 2 engined jobs. Busy all day from 7am to 5pm. The food is still okay..."

1st September 1943

"In my last couple of letters I omitted to tell you that we can get peaches here now, about 4 cents apiece (approx. 2d.)..."

In the comics over here they have a person called 'Superman' – wish I was he – he would just fly off into space – travel thousands of miles in very few seconds..."

2nd September 1943

"As you say... I am keeping my hand in re. the sketching. I would prefer them in a home to ordinary pictures. You should see the efforts I did on the walls of various buildings at Moncton Officers' Mess, Sergts. Mess and Airmans' Mess; some in chalk, others in charcoal – at the time they did not have the necessary boards so I expect them to wear off. They may be there by the time Henry gets there tho'. At the time of writing I am trying to do some black and white landscape efforts. I'm afraid I was rather reticent about showing you, especially in our courting days, but my Mum and family know of this hidden talent!! For long life in sketching, etc. paint is the best. That was not available at Moncton during my sojourn there."

16th September 1943

"Again I am writing to you and hoping that everything is going along very well with you. I'll be happier when everything is over – now I am trying to await some news calmly – this is one occasion when I don't feel unconcerned – and I for one ... can be very unconcerned about most anything. Even flying to me now does not contain any thrills – getting used to it now...."

Did Mum and Morf come up to your home that Sunday – they said they would – and did they bring any apples – were they the ones I like – Sparrows place team(??) and some smashing pippins. Today a wolf appeared on the 'drome, by all accounts it has been around here for some time; an attempt was made to get it with a revolver – it was too wily tho! May get a chance to get at him again. There is one consolation about being out here – I can buy cigars (they are plentiful) and hand them out after the event. They smoke them here as we do cigarettes over there...

Tell me in your next letter what the hospital is like – I do hope you get every attention – should do, you're paying for it."

21st September 1943

"Received a letter from Morf yesterday as well – she tells me that she had a fortnights holiday with Pop also with Marj and Dos – some holiday eh!..."

26th September 1943

"Time, of late, seems to travel very quickly – so quickly in fact that my days seem to be so full with classes etc. I have to write letters whenever I can find time to put my books away – which, although it mightn't seem a very hard thing to do, is in reality a wonder because I have them either laid out in front of me or underneath my arm. In my last letter I made a bold statement about writing a descriptive letter... but I know you will forgive me if I leave it until later – as you know sweet, one must be in the mood for it. Anyway Jack, your brother, gave you an idea of it some years ago. It is the same rugged and lovely looking country now as it was then. My existence up to date is very full; today for example we started classes at 7.30am, at 11am we went to Church, left there at 12 noon for lunch, then back to the classroom at 1pm left classes at 5pm for tea, then back again at 6pm until 8pm. It is now 8.30pm and here I am writing to you sweet. I am in the YMCA lounge and they have started a fire going, not coal, of course, but logs. That is what happens every day – if not at Church we are in the classroom – until this coming weekend when we have a 48hr pass. I think I'll slip down to Toronto to see a film and get a swim or two in."

(My mother's middle brother, Jack, left for Canada with the Salvation Army when he was 17, in 1931. He spent two years living with a Native American Indian learning how to survive in the Canadian Rockies.)

1st October 1943

"Today we had a progress exam, a paper on which is a set of questions re the work we have done in the past fortnight – it was a bit of a bind, I staggered thro' it somehow. We have another in another 2 weeks and so on to the end of the course. Aircraft recognition is pretty hot here, we have to recognise a plane in less than half a second, that's no 'line shooting' sweet, it's 'gen'. One hasn't time to blink or else 'you've had it'. Up to the present I've enjoyed the course, bags of actual stuff to do – not just sitting around and imagining what may happen. Get my full quota of flying too. This weekend I am off (48hrs) am not going any place, just resting up..."

I am still in good condition, we have to attend the PT class, can't dodge it at all, have about 2 games of soccer a week, no good facilities here for swimming so have to do without, anyway the weather's on the change now."

11th October 1943 - (incorrectly dated 11th September!)

"For a couple of weeks and a few days now a letter hadn't reached me (s'all right because the other chaps have not received any either for about 3 weeks) and then the day before yesterday (Saturday 9th) I was told by a chap that there was a telegram for me. I dashed away to the post office, received it – and baby! Was I relieved to find you both okay. Between knowing of the telegram and getting it – did I sweat – phew. Didn't know what was coming. Congrats. Darling – so we have a daughter – what is she like – any hair – does she cry a lot – is she reddish – and above all who does she look like – you. We have a 48hr pass this weekend – I hope, and I shall try and get a cablegram off acknowledging yours – town is so far away and it is after 6pm before we finish (unless we are flying and then it is 8.30pm. Yesterday (Sunday) I sat all through classes thinking about us and the youngster – couldn't stir enough energy to write – sorry sweet – dazed I'm afraid. What does she weigh? Send a photograph as soon as possible won't you. Are you satisfied with the name of Carol Ann – I shall most probably call her Ann anyway – what will you – I've got a new girl now haven't I sweet – shall take her to the cinema with me and all (minus the loo and steps of course). Did everything go okay darling was there a lot of difficulty or not so much as you expected. What do the folks think of her, has Mum seen her yet....

Ask your daughter if she would like a brother...

When I arrive home I expect I shall be rushed out of doors with the 'pram' – with empty stomach and all – ah well – I shall have to find solitude in the 'Bird in Hand'. Does your Pop still attend the lectures there – he does – good show – what. What's the daughter going to be do you think - typist, teacher, singer, or what. Wonder what she'll think of her Pop – eh! Pretty grim I expect."

(I was born on Saturday 2nd October 1943 at Brocket Hall in Hertfordshire. During the war years Brocket Hall became a maternity hospital run by the Red Cross, where mothers who were due to give birth at the London Hospital were evacuated. Over 8,000 babies were born in Lord Melbourne's Room and recovering mothers' spent time in the Prince Regent's Chinese Room.)

15th October 1943

"How's the daughter... I'm dying to see her, and I'm bursting with self contentment – it's never happened to me before you know!!! How are you both – very fit I hope. That's a lifetime of work for us isn't it, shall have to think of schooling, etc. etc. (etceteras stand for millions of things I can't find room to put down in this letter). What does she do – sleep all day, cry for food – and who is it doing the nappies whilst I'm over here. I do hope that everything is quiet over there sweet. By the time you read this I expect you will be at home again, you'll have plenty to occupy your time now ... wish I could be there sharing the company you have, don't suppose I shall be able to get a word in at all with 2 girls about the place now – will I? Have the folks seen her – short of letters from home as well...

Give the heiress a nice hug and kiss from her already devoted father – give the folks all my best and most sincere wishes...”

There are no more letters for the rest of 1943 and 1944. The V1's or flying bombs arrived in June 1944 and my maternal grandparents' home in Crouch End was bombed. It is likely that any letters addressed to my mother in London were lost at this time.

My father's service record for 1944 shows the following:

11 th December 1943	Air Observers School (7 AOS)
1 st February 1944	?Professional Development (31 PD)
5 th March 1944	High Explosives (HE)
13 th March 1944	?Under Training (U/T)
14 th March 1944	Personnel Reception Centre (7 PRC)
5 th April 1944	Whitley Bay
2 nd May 1944	Personnel Reception Centre (7 PRC)
“	Observers Advanced Flying Unit (4 (0) AFU)
6 th June 1944	Operational Training Unit (30 OTU)
28 th August 1944	11 Base
1 st September 1944	Heavy Conversion Unit (1668 HCU)
16 th October 1944	626 Squadron
19 th November 1944	156 Squadron
“	Pathfinder Force, Navigational Training Unit (PFF NTU)
28 th November 1944	156 Squadron
22 nd December 1944	626 Squadron

“After finishing their specialist training pilots, navigators and bomb-aimers had a further spell at an advanced school before finally arriving at an OTU. Wireless operators and gunners went there directly.

At the OTUs the British came together with their Australian and New Zealand counterparts from the Empire schools (the Canadians formed their own, separate groups of squadrons). It was here that one of the most crucial processes in the training programme took place, the welding of individuals into crews....

The process of selection was called ‘crewing up’. In devising it the RAF departed from its strictly utilitarian selection and training methods and took an enormous leap of faith. Instead of attempting a scientific approach to gauge compatibility they put their trust entirely in the magic of human chemistry. The crews selected themselves. The procedure was simple. The requisite numbers of each aircrew category were put together in a large room and told to team up.

....

Jack Currie reached his OTU at the end of 1942... ‘(I) imagined that the process would be just as impersonal as most others that we went through in the RAF... But what happened was quite different. When we had all paraded in the hangar and the roll had been called, the chief ground instructor got up on a dais. He wished us good morning... and said: ‘Right chaps, sort yourselves out.’”

Taken from ‘Bomber Boys’ by Patrick Bishop (2007)

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The following letters cover January and February 1945. All are addressed to my mother at my paternal grandparents home in Greenhithe, where my mother and I were staying at the time. The letters are sent from Sgts. Mess Green.

17th January 1945

"Received Friday's and Sunday's letters' today. We had to put down at another 'drone a day or so ago – so was unable to get time enough for writing. Forgive the lapse! I've received the parcel and two books of stamps – also tell Mum I received her letter. Carol will earn quite a number of crafty slaps from me if she becomes naughty. What the devil is a 'cup of hot blackberry' sweet, do you mean to tell me you folks boil those things and drink them. What's it like? ... By the bye sweet, that little effort of yours – all soldiers are not having such rough times. I'm afraid that it is not 'roll on next Monday' – but the one after..."

Tonight we are off – working last night. Tell Pop that I wore his long woolly underpants on the trip last night – bang on! I'll bring those shoes I promised him when I come down on leave.

How does Morf like the office work – I hope it is office work – let me know, sweet. You can probably give her a few tips on that stuff, yourself, having 'dabbled' in the business.

Heard from Fred lately – how's he doing?

I think I'll have two pints after I post this letter, been very quiet lately, don't drink like I used to – eh! sweet. Today was very sunny, for a change; as we were working until 3.30am this morning we did not stir until 1.00pm this afternoon so the day seemed pretty short....

Kiss Carol for me and tell her I'm annoyed with her non-sleeping tactics – as if she'll worry!.."

19th January 1945

"This is a very short effort; I might not have time to write over the weekend. With luck I should be home by next Saturday night (27th). Do hope the youngster is okay now. How is Peter getting along – well I hope. Very cold today – shall be working until about 2.00am..."

20th January 1945

"Today we are not flying – which is very unusual for us because we nearly always fly on a Saturday. How's the weather down there, still snow around here, and looks as if more will be coming. Do hope everything is going along smoothly down there – no colds etc. Hope Pop's got rid of his.

Carol's should be away by now. How is she behaving, any more falls and what of the nightly episode, seems to be a permanent effort now, doesn't it?..."

*I do not think Carol's fall should affect her sweet, they are immune to ordinary bumps. What do you mean sweet, that Carol is a 'lesson for the next one'. What next one, no more for us. When on my next leave, I shall sleep with Pop...
A week more and it will be started – good show!*

*Is Morf getting used to her job now – or does she seem fed-up with it. Some of the employees at Henleys are pretty crude and self-opinionated sweet – I've seen some of them. You too have probably met up with them. I used to combat their low style with an even lower one – but I suppose it is different for girls like yourself. I think Morf will eventually go nursing myself – don't you sweet...
... we have had all the sheets taken away for exchange for new ones, been sleeping in blankets for over a week now – I much prefer sheets, I sleep better in them; we probably won't get them back until after the leave. I am going to pack my washing over the weekend, providing of course that 'Butch' Harris (man in charge of Bomber Command) does not require our services.*

I shall end now sweet, if I do not fly tomorrow I will write again. Give my love and regards to the folks, tell them I often think of them although I don't write – you're residing there ... is making me lazy in letter writing. Kiss X the "I won't go to sleep" child for me – bless her..."

(During the Second World War Henleys were involved in several important military projects including the manufacture of cable and electrical components for PLUTO (pipeline under the ocean) that was used to pump fuel from England to France after the D-Day landings in 1944. They were the company of choice when a system had to be devised as a countermeasure to the growing threat of German magnetic mines. As a result a new site was constructed in 1939 in Gravesend and a complex of tunnels built underneath it to provide air raid shelter for the company's employees.)

21st January 1945

"... We don't know yet if we will be working tonight or in the morning, so have to stay in camp, not that we usually go out anyway. I haven't been into Lincoln since being back here..."

*Kiss X the sleepless child for me – give her a gentle tap to go on with...
PS. ... how's Peter – heard yet?"*

(Peter was the young son of my mother's eldest brother Pat and he contracted polio around this time. Peter would have been 13. He later joined the RAF and became a Squadron Leader but was never fit enough to fly. He loved sailing and for many years had possession of the RAF sailing boat 'Dambusters' in Southampton. It now resides in Monaco with Peter's son who works as a yacht management consultant.)

23rd January 1945

"... As I'm not working tonight I think I'll go to the camp cinema. Glad to hear you folks received word from Tom, glad also he reached the other side okay..."

4th February 1945

“Short letter to let you know I arrived back okay – came in just before midnight... My promotion is not confirmed yet so I’m still a common Sgt. For a week or so – damn them. I left my keys and cigarette tin down there sweet – could you send them on sometime. There doesn’t seem to be anything doing today, so far – hope not.... Do hope everything is okay down there sweet. I didn’t care very much for leaving you yesterday – I bet Carol wondered where I was going! There is some talk of doing 36 trips to a tour now – just my hellish luck. Why was I ever keen to join this mob. Treatment’s no better than the army so we might as well be in the artillery or some other regiment.

I met Ken (the pilot) at the station, he’d been in London all morning – didn’t visit those friends of his. For a bloke who is engaged he doesn’t seem to want to be with his girl until the last minute, does he. The train left dead on 5.50pm. I had 15 minutes to spare and my fare (single) cost 10/- not too bad...

PS. Please try and send some writing paper sweet – on the last couple of pages of this block. Ta X”

(“On 4th February 1945 Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt met in the Crimea to discuss the war’s next crucial phase. On the subject of bombing the Red Army made a request for air action to hinder the enemy from moving troops to the Eastern Front... Four days later the following targets were selected for their importance in relation to the movements of Evacuees from, and of military forces to, the Eastern Front. On the list were Berlin, Dresden and Chemnitz. It was Dresden that was to be dealt with first.”
['Bomber Boys' by Patrick Bishop])

I believe that the reason for extending the tour from 30 to 36 was because of these impending bombing raids. An airman’s log at the Bomber Command Memorial also mentions the extra ops around the same time in early February. My father’s crew were reported missing on their 34th op. on the night of 18th February 1945.)

5th February 1945

“...I am writing this at 1.30pm in all probability I shall be unable to write tonight – working...

*Let me know if you are going to use those units and the dough that the bomb damage brought you. How’s Carol? Did she miss me; bet she didn’t have a spell like she did after Morf commenced working...
I am going to have an hour or so of sleep now darling – in case it is a long job...”*

6th February 1945

*“Weather is giving us a break today – foggy and raining....
Tonight I am going to the camp cinema to see ‘Standing Room Only’ – hope it is good entertainment. I’m getting fed-up with service life, afraid I’m not the type who will request to be kept on after the war is over. I do hope my next leave will come around on time (every 6 weeks) don’t want to be done out of any leave....”*

8th February 1945

"Sorry unable to write yesterday, working nearly all day..."

Would like to have travelled to Gravesend with you for the fish on Monday. I really enjoyed the last effort. Hope everything is okay down there – no colds or rotten weather and the like. Have the folks heard from Tom lately – would like a few months over there myself – more silk stockings then – huh!

Did your mother get that cooker after all – wait until the day arrives when you use it. I don't say very much about the flat ... but when things are fixed up (to a certain extent anyway) I do think I am going to enjoy it. The only thing that worries me is that when I return from leave my wife may entertain her boyfriends there!! ("joke") As I write I am eating a nice piece of Cadbury's chocolate, the dinner wasn't good enough to fill a kitten...."

9th February 1945

"... Perhaps we are fated to have only one child darling – in a way I am most relieved because I do not want you to go through the same experiences as you did for Carol. It's not a really enjoyable one is it?"

Tonight I am going to the camp cinema, don't know what's on yet. Horribly tame life I lead isn't it?...

I never have taken any notice of the WAAFs here, in fact I'm most blunt and formal, but I notice that they never take liberties with me - whereas they fool around with the other chaps and sometimes are most cheeky with them. I think chaps are foolish to allow them to become familiar.... All I am waiting for now is peace...

Do hope you will like the cooker sweet – somehow I think we'll enjoy that flat, after having nothing, don't you..."

11th February 1945

"...Don't know if I shall be working tonight yet – hope not, not feeling particularly workish today. I like to read about Carol's doings, they amuse me. If I do not watch my step I shall probably be the means of spoiling her. Better leave things to you I think, sweet.

So you want to get the flat a bit spruced up before I can come into it – don't want me to be in the way during the cleaning – huh? Got dragged out on my only visit there, didn't I?"

12th February 1945

"... I did not have to work last night as I thought I might, good show, not particularly worried if they leave me alone for the duration now – your company must have softened me up – huh?"

Night off tonight too, I think sweet – suppose I'll have the usual visit to the camp cinema. Do hope that things are pretty quiet down there – no aerial activity!

I suppose Morf is becoming more and more the independent worker. Is Pop keeping up okay – the only time he actually loses is when Tom and I come home and upset his diet. Carol keeps busy all the day long I should imagine, surprises me where they get their vitality from – such small bodies too...”

(My father’s crew were on the Dresden raid, 13th February, and the Chemnitz raid, 14th February. The pilot’s log records the following:

Dresden: “Bombed centre of fires on Master Bomber’s orders. On run up target illuminated by flares. Tl green seen on fringe of fires with red Tl’s in middle of fires. Attack seemed to be shifting across river N.E. of aiming point. Main town area on fire.”

Chemnitz: “Bombed fires among incendiaries. We arrived at the target at 00.30hrs and saw no marking although Master Bomber ordered them to be bombed. We orbited for 15 mins. waiting for them and eventually went down to 16,000ft where the cloud was thin and saw fires and burning incendiaries. We chose the middle of the fire area and bombed.”)

15th February 1945

“I’ve just finished two long nights of work so I know you’ll forgive me for lack of mail in the last couple of days....

Why is Pop going to Northfleet and tell Mum it’s time she packed up that job – too much to have to do night work all the time. We are not working tonight ... so I’m going to have a couple of pints – high living huh? The only thing I look forward to these days is leave and more leave. This morning when I came back (6.00am) and got into bed, I lay awake smoking and thinking of you...

Will end now, so that I can get a wash before tea. Shall try and write tomorrow. Ask the girls to drop a line if they can find a moment.

Give folks my love and regards. Kiss X my daughter for me, bless her...”

16th February 1945

“Please excuse the one-pager – been a little busy on the ground today – clearing up my kit etc.... So we have acquired a cooker – improving huh!

As each day passes by it is one day nearer another lovely leave – the one bright spot in an otherwise pretty drab existence.

I expect Carol will reach the stage where she will begin to wonder who the devil that bloke is who comes home at all hours.”

My father’s last letter was written on 17th February 1945 but the postmark was dated 19th February, 9.00am.

17th February 1945

“Received your letter, written Wednesday, this afternoon.

There is no need to send up those spare sheets sweet, I manage by borrowing off the chaps or from the Mess, thanks all the same.

The more I hear of Carol the bigger and older she seems to get, be glad when I can watch her grow myself. Not working today again – good show! The rest of the crew have gone to Lincoln. I didn't feel like it myself. I much prefer to just sit around and think sometimes – anyway, Lincoln has nothing to offer me, it's a pretty drab layout all round. After writing this letter I will probably have a couple of pints in the Mess. Is the weather any good there sweet – drab here. Have you been to the cinema lately, don't expect so, you never do unless I'm there. ...

*Maybe when we get installed in that flat we may be able to visit the 'locals' (cinemas) once or twice. The day is not far off when we shall be accompanied by Carol. Films may turn out a boon yet, may save us having to tell Carol fairy stories – lazy type, that's me. Heard from Ruth (my mother's sister-in-law, living at the time in **Scotland**) when it will be okay for you to go up there sweet. If nothing interrupts the system I should be home for my next leave around March 24th, a couple of days earlier or later. Heard from Fred lately and the folks from Tom. I should very much like to take you on a visit to the States sweet – just we three perhaps – enough dough and about 3 months off work, just knocking around in a car. What a dream! – sounds good though – huh!*

Will conclude now sweet – try and write tomorrow again. Give folks love and regards. Kiss X the girl in the dungarees for me... Be good, bye Your Jack Xxxx”

The letter's envelope is very worn. My mother obviously carried it around with her. At some point she noted the following on the back of the envelope:

Pay £2 5s.

Baby's allowance 3/10d.

Widow's Police pension 11/6d.

Widow's RAF pension £2 13s.

Carol's RAF pension 7/2d

On the night of 18th February 1945 five Lancasters of 626 Squadron were detailed for mine laying in the Heligoland Bight. They were part of a force of 21 Lancasters and 4 Halifaxes mining the area. There were a few bursts of heavy flak and a small number of searchlights in the Cruxhaven area. All returning aircraft claimed to have dropped their mines in the allotted area. Two 626 Squadron Lancasters failed to return; NF907 UM-K2 (my father's crew) and PA216 UM-C2. Both are assumed to have crashed at sea with no trace. The 14 members of the two 626 Squadron crews have no known graves and are remembered at the RAF Runnymede Memorial.

Lilian May Jones never remarried. She became a school secretary in London and later a school matron at two boys' public schools in Somerset and Devon. She died, aged 92, in 2012.

Carol Ann Jones joined **BBC Radio** as a production secretary in 1961. She later became a television producer/director working for both the **BBC** and **ITV**. Carol remained in broadcasting for 35 years. In her 50's she retrained as a psychological therapist and counselled victims of serious crime and domestic abuse. She now runs a **B&B** in Devon with her husband.

APPENDIX

In March 2005 I placed a photograph of my father, Ft. Sgt. John Thomas Jones, on the help page of the 626 Squadron website. My father's Lancaster Bomber was reported missing on the night of 18th February 1945 and I was hoping that relatives and/or friends of the crew might get in touch.

The crew members of NF907 UM-K2 were as follows:

Flying Officer HOLLAWAY, Kenneth George (A418276) R.A.A.F. (Pilot)
Avenel, Victoria Australia (aged 21)

Sgt. EDWARDS, Reginald Francis (3050372) R.A.F. (V.R.) (Flight Engineer)
Church Gresley, Derbyshire (aged 19)

Sgt. GASCOIGNE, Thomas William (1516668) R.A.F. (V.R.) (Navigator)
Wallsend, Northumberland (aged 24)

Ft. Sgt. JONES, John Thomas (1800039) R.A.F (V.R.) (Bomb Aimer)
Hornsey, Middlesex (aged 27)

Warrant Officer GILL, Robert Douglas (A417360) R.A.A.F. (Wireless Operator)
Plympton, South Australia (aged 22)

Sgt. HARRISON, Edward (2221713) R.A.F. (V.R.) (Mid Upper Gunner)
Chesterton, Staffordshire (aged 20)

Sgt. HUGHES, Derek William (1881602) R.A.F. (V.R.) (Rear Gunner)
Longford, Warwickshire (aged 20)

In April 2007 I received an email from David Thomas Mitchell in Australia. His grandmother, Roma, was **Flying Officer Hollaway's** sister and the family had not known that Ken was flying missions. Ken came from a small farming town in Victoria, Australia, called Avenel, near Melbourne. He was the son of Bobby and Jean Hollaway and had two sisters Norma and Roma. David told me that Ken loved flying from an early age and that Roma was 'intensely proud of her brother and the men who flew with him'. Ken's fiancé, Marjorie Willis, (mentioned in my father's letter of 4th February 1945) moved out to Australia after the war and lived with Ken's family. She never married.

I was also contacted by Ray Harrison, **Sgt. Harrison**'s younger brother, who had been doing his own research into the missing aircraft. Ray sent me the following letter he received from WW2 researcher, Peter Hinchcliffe, in May 2000:

"Following on from my letter of the 27th April I have now heard from my German contact, and we are able to narrow down to two 'possibles' the night fighter who shot down your brother's aircraft.

As you are aware only two Lancasters were lost that night and from my German friend I learn that only two night-fighter claims, each for a Lancaster, were made. Unfortunately, we do not have times for the 'kills' but I think that we can say with confidence that the two claimed were those of Flying Officer Hollaway and Flying Officer Lucas (NF907 and PA216).

The two Germans concerned were Oberleutnant Heinz Reuter and Hauptmann Johann Dreher, both of IV/NJG 3 (The 4th Gruppe of Nachjagdgeschwader 3). A night-fighter Geschwader comprised three or four Gruppen, each of about thirty aircraft. I think I am correct in saying that NJG 3 was equipped at that time with the JU88 (Junker JU88). It was Reuter's 12th (and last) kill, and Dreher's 2nd (and last). Hauptmann Dreher was a former bomber pilot who had transferred to night fighters, and he was a holder of the Knight's Cross to the Iron Cross.

IV NJG 4 was responsible for the defence of Holland, Northern Germany and Scandinavia at this period, which strengthens the possibility that one of these two men shot down your brother. We are not able to say which airfield they were flying from, because the whole night-fighter system was in considerable confusion at that time, with small (Staffeln – usually three to a Gruppe) and larger units switching tactically from airfield to airfield, often on a day-to-day basis.

Dreher was killed in action the following month, but Reuter survived the war."

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Most German night-fighters were fitted with a deadly weapon that had decimated RAF bombers for nearly two years without being fully understood by Bomber Command – this was 'Schrage Musik'. It comprised of two upward-firing 20mm cannons installed at the rear of the cockpit, inclined at an angle of 70 or 80 degrees which were aimed through a Revi gun-sight above the pilot's head. Having spotted his target, the pilot manoeuvred into position underneath the bomber, effectively in its blind-spot.

A few cannon shells aimed between the inner and outer engines, the area of the fuel tanks on the Lancaster, invariably was enough to cause the destruction of the bomber as the wings erupted on fire.

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Johann Dreher's death, in the early hours of 4th March 1945, became known as the 'Night of the Intruders' and the events of that night made it onto the front pages of the Yorkshire Evening Press:

"Having already claimed two Halifax Bombers of 158 Squadron returning to RAF Lissett, near Bridlington, Hauptmann Johann Dreher (Iron Cross) flying his Junkers JU88 of 12 NUG, set his sights on a French 347 Squadron Halifax, returning to RAF

Elvington. At approximately 1.50am as Capitaine Notelle approached Elvington, he received the warning of the attack, just as the airfield lights went out. He pulled his aircraft up and headed north for Croft, narrowly escaping the menacing intruder.

The nightfighter continued its attack on Elvington, strafing the road at a passing taxi. Circling for another pass at 1.51am, the JU88 was too low, clipped a tree and crashed into Dunnington Lodge, a farmhouse on the outskirts of the airfield. Machine gun fire from the fighter had strafed the farmhouse, before the aircraft crashed through one section of the building. Here, farmer Richard Moll and his wife, Helen (60) were awakening, having been startled by the gunfire. Their daughter in law, Violet (20) was making her way to their bedroom when the aircraft struck. Meanwhile, her husband, Fred, was saving the life of their 3 year old son, Edgar, by scooping the child up in one arm and, with fire extinguisher in the other, fighting his way through flames and debris to the outside. Tragically, both his wife and mother died as a result of their injuries, shortly after admission to hospital. Richard Moll survived initially, but suffered severe burns and died later. The JU88 ended up in a field at the junction of the Elvington and Durrington roads.

This was the last German aircraft to crash on British soil during the war, preceded by a 7 NJG JU88 crashing at Welton, near Lincoln at 01.48am and 5 NJG JU88 crashing near Halesworth, Suffolk, at 01.37am.”

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Heinz Reuter survived the war and became a weatherman.

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For a full list of Flying Officer Hollaway's crew ops. go to.....

For photographs and documents relating to Flt. Sgt. J.T. Jones go to....

Carol Ann Jones
June 2017