

Letter written to:

Mr. H. W. Owen

England

January 16, 1957

Dear Red:

I received your letter yesterday and it was sure nice to hear from you.

I found a list of the crew addresses in some old papers just before Christmas and decided to send them all a Christmas card just to see what would happen. So far, you are the only one I have heard from, but I hope to hear from some of the others soon.

Let's see if I can get things in some order. I guess I'd better start after we turned back. Can you remember the tachometer of one of the engines going between 5000 revs and back to about 400 revs per minute and then back up to 5000 or so, anyway we feathered that one, I think it was the port-inner. That was the reason for turning back. The port-outer's heat started to climb until it was well in the red and when we thought she was about to take fire, another engine quit, which one I never bothered to find out, I told you to get out. Slim II didn't bother to hand me my chute as he was supposed to do (I've bawled him out for it since) he just up and left. I had a heck of a time reaching for my chute and trying to hold old T up. I can remember everything going perfectly quiet and things floating in the air, and I thought "I've hit and this is being dead", but I guess it was a stall because I had a hard time getting her level again and Slim tells me he saw the old kite in a spin, anyway when I got her O.K. again, I dived from the top of the stairs out through the hatch. I clipped my chin on the way out and when I came to, I was hanging by one hook and T. was screaming away on fire.

I can't remember pulling the rip cord or anything. She made a lovely display when she hit though. I landed in a pine forest on a dirt road and twisted my ankle when I landed. I started back to where I figured you guys were, and found Norm's chute in the middle of a ploughed up field. I buried that and kept going. I saw flashlights and heard dinghy whistles going all over the place and figured if it was the crew, they must be nuts doing that in enemy territory, so I headed back

through the forest. I walked on, should I say limped most of the night and finally came to a farm house. I woke up the people and asked them to show me where I was, they did. I figured they would report me to the Jerry and they would figure I would go South, so I went North. I hit a main road and found an old mill in the middle of a village and curled up and went to sleep and there I stayed all of Sunday. Sunday, I contacted a Frenchman in the village and got rid of my battle dress jacket and got hold of an old cap. He had some idea of keeping me there for some purpose, but after a scuffle I got out and started to walk. I walked through Chaumont and tried to steal a car or bike but had no luck so kept walking. The next few nights, I slept in barns and -finally decided if I was to get anywhere, I had to walk during the day, so I put a pitchfork over my shoulder and walked during the day too. Jerry trucks and troops going down to occupy the South of France passed me by the thousands and I guess they didn't figure anything was phony but finally a Frenchman on a bike passed me and kept looking over his shoulder at me.

I started into the next village, Rolampont, and he stepped out from the side of the road and started jabbing at me in French. I said, (get this) Je suis un Pollock. He started talking to me in Polish. It was so funny I burst out laughing and told him who I was. He took me home and his mother darned my socks and fed me while he left. I figured he had gone for Jerry and didn't really care by then.

In a couple of hours he came back and told me to walk down the R.R. line until I came to a big brick house and then ask for the lady who spoke English. I did as he said and found her. She would have nothing to do with me until she found I was fool enough to be carrying pamphlets with me. She figured I was either crazy or was what I said I was and sent me to her maid's home where I lived in the attic for about a week. One morning early she got me up, tracked me through town and loaded me on a lorry full of bricks and waved me goodbye. The driver had escaped from Germany and he and the English-speaking lady had arranged to have this load of bricks taken to a town about 16 kilometers from Switzerland. We had lots of fun on the ride, stopped for Germans and eating in restaurants with them even having a drink with them all through which I was a mute and trying to hide my gold tooth. He finally dropped me about 10 miles from Switzerland and about 8 o'clock at night I was on my own again and walking. I knew how many rivers there were to cross etc. and kept on going until I heard a dog on a bridge ahead. I crawled up and there was also a guard on the bridge, so I went up stream stripped off, and with my clothes tied to my back swam the river and dam near drowned in the process. After praying to every God in the universe I

got to the other side, drank a whole bottle of wine, dressed, hit the road again and promptly got halted. I figured I still had one river to go but must have missed one somewhere as I was thrown in jail in Switzerland. Three days later I was claimed by Br. Legation and new clothes were bought for me and I was sent to Vevey on the coast of Lake Geneva where I spent Xmas and New Years.

On Jan. 2, I was taken back to Bern and put through a training course of climbing mountains for a week, and then I was sent to Geneva and piggy backed across the border by a Frenchman. Put on a train and rode across France, changed to a bus and had a ride through the Pyrenees. Finally, we got to our contact. (I was with a Frenchman this time by the way), the priest we contacted didn't know we were coming so gave us 24 hours to get out of town. Onto a train again, and this time to a hotel in Perpignan where I spent another week. Contact was made with a Spaniard and on a train again, and then a walk straight into an ambush of 12 Jerries with machine guns, I figure the Spaniard was paid by the Jerries as I never saw him again. I was only about 4 miles from Spain and right along the Med. We were south of a place called Argelles if you care to look it up.

Back in jail in Perpignan and the Gestapo, me in leg irons and handcuffs then to a big prison in Paris. Start of a trial as a saboteur because I wouldn't tell what Frenchman had helped me. Finally a friendly Luftwaffe man sympathetic for a poor bugger in leg irons and hand cuffs, beaten up and bent, phoned Berlin for me and next day I was off to Dulag Luft Stalag VIII B, followed by the march across Germany in 45, me passing out on the road with dysentery and finally liberation while in hospital.

Flew back to England and in Bournemouth for V.E. Day. Went to Darlington got engaged to Elsie, (do you remember her) and then home as fast as I knew how. Hospital again when I got home and a discharge in September 45. School for a year with the idea of being a Geologist but somewhere ambition got lost maybe I drank it I don't know. Finally I joined the Post Office as a postal clerk. Engagement with Elsie fell through and in 1947 I got married. Ten weeks later my wife died after an appendectomy.

I went on the trains for the P.O. sorting mail and covered about 5000 miles a month that way. Early in 49 I got married again this time I picked the best. We mortgaged our soles for a house and then the family started to arrive. First came a girl Georgina Colleen then a boy Collin, then a girl Lorelee, then a girl Shauneen. We hope after the flood we have the situation under control

now. It's just a nice sized family and as any father will tell you "Mine are the sweetest and smartest and most spoiled kids in the world."

Christmas 1955 I got pneumonia and ulcers and had to come off the trains as now I am back in the P.O. in the registration branch. Not a bad job, at least it provides food and shelter for the 6 of us.

I see you looked up Calgary in some Geography book or something so let me tell you about it. What before I start, is this about a famous auctioneer? I don't know of any. Let me know maybe I am missing part of life over here.

Calgary in some Geography book or something What before I start, is this about a famous any. Let me know maybe I am missing part

Calgary at last count was 149,000 (spot on the map to you) 10 years ago the population was 98,000 and the forecast for 66 is 200,000. Growing too,

what? We are in the lee of the mountains and are noted for our chinooks which is the wind from the west coming over the mountains and picking up moisture. Temperature can be 30 below in the morning and 50 above in the afternoon and you think yours changes a lot. We have 8 months winter and about 4 months summer but I wouldn't live anywhere else in the world.

We are 85 miles from Banff the beautiful. I guess you have heard about that place and of course Lake Louise is only 30 miles past that and it is supposed to be one of the most perfect landscapes in the world. Beauty surrounds us and believe it or not we don't appreciate it but being a fisherman and going to out of the way places, some scenes make you stop and marvel at their beauty.

Things are so different here from what you people have that it's hard to explain the distances we do cover. Two hundred miles to do 2 hours fishing and return is nothing. Our distances are so great that no one bothers figuring out how far it really is, you just go. The nearest half decent beach for swimming is 150 miles from here. Just a nice distance to take the family for a days picnic. Total cost for transportation 14 gallons of gas return at \$.40 a gallon (about 1 L 105). Remember our cars here only give 20 miles to a gallon. With an English car, figure half of that. Wages are I guess higher here than there, where I remember Elsie's father drew L 5 a week in an

iron foundry and raised his family on it and had his own house. Here wages (my wages are \$305 per month) (about L 100) are higher than there and I think we have a higher standard of living than you.

I was in a lot of homes in England and can never remember seeing a washing machine. Here if kids getting married don't have a fridge, a deep freezer, automatic washer, dryer and car they figure they have a poor start. spoiled brats. Houses cost about L 3000 to L 4000 but a pint of blood per month gets them paid for in time.

Oil here brings in a lot of revenue to the province but actually it is just an accepted part of life. All houses are heated and cooking is done with natural gas and new oil fields are found every day and now they are building 3000 mile pipe lines to ship it to the east. Alberta because of a lack of iron and the distances involved doesn't have the industry it should have. It is mainly a farm and ranch country with new plastic industry starting. Electrical power we have to burn but what we need is a new source of iron. Our mountains don't seem to have much of it or maybe it only needs finding.

Our potential is terrific and with all the new immigrants, we some day will surpass the States. That's faith in case you don't recognize it.

Let's see now back to me. Appearance about the same, still almost as much hair but with false teeth at the top. I can still get into my old uniform and be comfortable. I came out of P.O.W. as a Flight Lt. by the way. I am no longer the drinking fool you used to know, now I have about 1 drink a year and am a staid old family man and father.

Old friends of the Sqdn. I never see or hear of. Slim II I last saw in 1947 when I went east (he is about 3000 miles away so not seeing him is understandable). He is a policeman in Hamilton, Ontario now and sorry to say we didn't get a long too well. I don't know what happened but he turned mean for some reason and I just didn't care for how he treated his wife and kids. That I guess is his business though but we didn't hit it off too well.

This business of radio, I don't know any ham operators personally but will look around and let you know.

I was just reading your letter through again and you say you were out for a few days. What happened were you injured?

I heard while I was in the maids attic one of the crew had died and was going to try and find out where but the English lady assured me it was not one of my crew but I realize now it was Norm as they told me at Dulag Luft that he broke his neck in his shroud lines. I often wonder if maybe his Jewish appearance had anything to do with it. I was going to contact Mrs. Garfunkle when I got back to England but old wounds shouldn't be reopened.

Remember Dan Smardan? I phoned his father when I was coming through Montreal and learned he had bought it over there. I'm sorry I ever inquired. You seem to be a brighter boy than I ever thought (not running down ability either) but I gather designing is quite a job. Good boy. Sorry to hear Al Main got it. I took him for his first ride in a Halifax a natural pilot if ever there was one.

I was surprised to learn we were the only kite that night as it was a long trip.

About conduct of the crew, everyone was excited and no blame for any of it can be attached to anyone I figure we got some strong flak along the coast when we crossed and the rest was in God's hands.

Taffy Reed left a while before you guys though as I felt the tail turret swing out. I can't blame him either though. What an isolated position to be in, Tail End Charlie. Norm I feel sorry about, he was a great guy and whenever I meet a Jew I think of Funkletrumpet. By the way, I see our ice cream cone idea for marking up Italy trips on the aircraft caught on. At least we originated that.

Petch, the letch I remember well, and often wonder about how he did. I have thought of writing to Air Ministry for Gen on some of the guys but I guess I never will.

Have you heard what happened to Bill Gothercole (Sgt. Pilot) he was an old favorite of mine. I used to get candy and stuff from here for his kids.

There are so many guys gone and probably if we knew of them all it would shock us. I see Cheshire turned R.C. and runs homes for the sick and aged over there now.

Thinking back it was enough to make all of us, that came through it, turn to religion. I often wonder myself why some were spared and so many wonderful guys had to die.

Never mind the next one will be short and sweet.

That's enough for now Red but I will send a picture along as soon as I get a good still shot.
Personally I go in for colour movies.

Well cheerio for now,
All the best
Slim I (George Thom)

God, I wrote a book.