

## So Short a Time *(Unedited)*.

*June 11 1974 8:15 am.*

*Thirty years ago always I have hoped I would be able to put every detail as accurate as my memory will allow to finish the book that my darling husband started so long ago, the abrupt end of it came with his death over Germany on the 3/4 March 1945 on his last op.*

*I knew the exact time we lost the Lancaster; our love for each other was so strong. I knew at 12 o'clock when Tom Dykins the pilot, Doug, Bert, Stan, Red, Flight Lieutenant Thompson, and NZ Warrant Officer Jack Crawford Royal New Zealand Air Force my husband. He gave his life trying to save his two buddy who were trapped in the tail part of the plane.*

*Jack saw the smoke. He his self was a WAG Wireless Air Gunner, Red and Flight Lieutenant Thompson was navigator and Red was rear air*

gunner. The pilot gave the order for all to bale out. But as no answer came he assumed everyone had baled out. Tom he was 21 himself then baled out. But of course he had no way of knowing the other 3 were trapped in the smoke, which mercifully must have overcome them before the plane crashed in flames.

Such was the nature of the crash, my husband, Flight Lieutenant Thompson and Red were buried in a communal grave first of all by the Germans in Bevergen. Later, the British War Graves Commission re-interred them in the WG Cemetery.

For two months the relatives could get no communication through from Germany but one of the aircrew's father (Stan's father) managed to contact someone, and just before the end of the war, Pilot Officer Tom Dykins, Sergeant Doug Looms, Bert Price and Stan Jones were released from the internment camp and on arrival back to England, the four good kind friends that they were to my darling Jack, told all.

I was an airwoman and still at the OTU Camp at Barford St John where Jack and I were married from on his first leave before going on active service in Skellingthorpe, Lincolnshire. Each of the bereaved were visited by the four boys, because that's all they were. Tom 21, Stan about 23, Bert in his 20s, Doug was married with 3 children was the eldest in his 30s. what an ordeal those boys must have had to go through to tell us. That day stands out forever in my memory.

I wanted to know exactly what happened but when the crew arrived at Barford St John I was on duty up at the Section with officer Mary Hussy, now Mrs Baker, Wing Commander Baker's wife. My legs would not take me down. I did not want to be upset in front of those four boys who had so luckily been spared and I knew they had been through hell themselves. But eventually after 3 calls on the tannoy I went up to the site and spoke to them. I did so want to be brave and not break down

To see four instead of 7, as they always were, was hard, as they were a devoted crew and always went about together. But Tom, the pilot, told me exactly what happened.

Bert I knew but I had not met Stan before. Doug I knew well. The three single boys, after explaining went out, but Doug stayed back. Oh how I wished he had not tried to comfort me as I did not want to break down in front of those poor boys. But Doug comforted me and thank goodness I was able to cry and that is just what happened for four days after.

I was given four days compassionate leave but I could not believe even then Jack had been killed. For years I searched for his face in a crowd, and it took me 14 years to get an answer to my darling's death. It was retribution had to step in.

Probably some German mother's children maybe did not want to kill either and that is the only way I found some kind of peace to accept my great loss.

We were to have been repatriated even though dear Jack was missing.

I still carried on with my repatriation forms including signatures from many different people. Eventually I got my berth ticket and date of sailing by boat which would have taken 6 weeks to Hamilton, New Zealand, North Island. But I decided to stay in England (London) and have now been re-married 28 years and 2 daughters married, one son of 22 who was born on the date all those years after on the day my darling Jack was killed, 4 March '45. Peter will be 23, please God, next March.

We had met, the first time, Jack and I, on the first night I arrived at Barford St John. I arrived early in the day from Upper Heyford, Oxford.

I took a walk down through Blockesham, which was a quaint old world village. I walked straight through it and went back to camp.

As I had that day off I mentioned to Joyce Wight and Peggy Glover, what a quiet place I had got sent to after Upper Heyford. That was one Base, a large air force camp, but

they said we will take you with us this evening and we will introduce you to the crew who we are friendly with, which they did.

Jack was 22 then and very shy but was engaged to Barbara out in NZ.

But once I saw him the challenge was too much for me, and being a happy go lucky girl, I was then, Joyce, Peggy and I soon got to making him feel less shy. Oh the laughs we had. Poor Jack, he had grass down his collar, in his shoes and his hat. In fact we sat on him!

We had moved from one little village pub as I think the old Gent who ran the pub was a bit overwrought with Tom, Doug and who ever was playing the accordion - mouth organ and what ever other instrumentation the crew had.

They had a small band between them. So we went on to another little pub but stayed outside on the lawn. Jack took me back to camp that night then he had to go back to Upper Heyford by transport. We made a date for later in the week.

But Doug had taken him to

Coventry to visit a few relatives and do a bit of entertaining in the concerts.

2 or 3 days later Jack came back and we met up again. That evening he took me out again. But this time, poor boy, he missed his transport back, so he had to walk 15 miles to Upper Heyford. He could not get anyone to stop and give him a lift.

Next day he was at camp again and that evening he asked me to marry him. We were sitting on an ant hill at the time with the moon looking down on us. I was so amazed and happy. I said yes. 3 days later we were married at Bloxham church which is a 12 or 13 century church.

Then the vicar did not arrive to marry us, the best man had to go over to the vicarage and ask him what had happened. We were all waiting. It was so strange and quiet, no one daring to speak hardly. Anyway eventually the vicar came over and married us.

What had happened: the vicar from Banbury church had not confirmed our special licence with the vicar from Bloxham. So after that little sort out, we were married. The crew, by this time, had had to leave as they had finished their O.T.U. also were going also on leave. So Jack and I, Doris Samuels, Anne McKinley, Arnold Holt, and Doris's boyfriend Corporal Richener. So we all went down to a little public house, all in uniform, not one flower. I had a lovely leather bound prayer book Jack had bought and given me.

Then we went to Mr & Mrs River, who at that time, ran a table service. So Mr Rivers invited us in and he said "now, this is a very special occasion and although it is just about 12:30 pm" he said "I have some wine down in the cellar which is over 50 year sold, so I am going to open a bottle to toast your future happiness", which he did with his wife, there was just four of us in the front room, I had a small glass of it.



I don't remember much of that journey down to Banbury St or the train journey to Paddington where we stayed for 2 nights before travelling on to Shropshire to my home to my dear Mum to meet her new son-in-law. A 3 day stay there then off to Cheadle Hulme in Cheshire for a day and night then back to Paddington for 1 night.

Then my husband had to go to his new camp in Lincolnshire.

I returned to Barford St John, the girls had put two beds together and made it. I'd got to sleep in it with one of the girls. Oh, they were a grand lot.

We had only known each other, 3 weeks, Jack and I, and what a wonderful life we had - we lived for each other. I would have given my own life for his - if I could have saved him. I felt like that in those days and still do although all these years have passed and so many nasty, horrid and tragic things have happened, and are still.

I always said one day I will fulfil my wish to put the end to my dear Jack's book, which I have, written by him, of his travels from N Zealand to his 2 years in Canada, Calgary and Montreal and various other parts of the USA, he visited before he came to England and met and married me, his little Wiff Waaf, as he used to call me.

I was 20 when we married. I was not 21 when he got killed - my birthday was 13 days after. So the gold locket he had bought me and left in the jeweller's to be engraved, he didn't ever see me wear. But I had all his possessions returned from camp and still to this day have his mouth organ and several of his things. No one has been able to play it like he did. So it is very cherished. It is a double-sided Horner.

How I would have liked to have had just one reunion with Tom, Doug, Stan and Bert. But maybe yet it might be possible, somehow, somewhere, if they are still with us.

I myself, an active member of the

Royal British Legion for the past 14 years and it has given me a great deal of happiness to be able to give voluntarily to ex-service people in the Borough of West Ham.

Edna Ruth Crawford-Harris.