

S. O. Book 135.

Code 28-72-0.

*Flashbacks — to my tour with the  
Americans*

*May 1942 — August 1943*



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Dec 1<sup>st</sup>.

Ops laid on today - went through the motions - briefing etc, ready for an early take-off, then put back for five hours. Definite air of tension in the mess - these postponements are definitely bad for the morale - gives the boys too long to think about things. Bomb finally came through at a quarter to eleven at night - absolutely absurd waiting so long - couldn't see a thing for fog by then.

Dec 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Ops on again today. Took off early - 1640 - target 'the big city'. No hitles at take-off but the news wasn't so good at return. One a/c crashed, near Gamston, with four killed, four injured. A/c just went into the deck and went up in flames. No names yet. So ends another C-Charlie. D-Dog also missing, 17th Wells. Entirely unexpected - he was getting near the end of his tour. Add that on to V-Victor a few days ago - with six killed in the crash - and N-Nan where we lost an a/c but no crew - thank goodness - and things are looking pretty thin. Now three o'clock in the morning so must pack up in case there's a thing on tomorrow - today rather! forgot to mention we had a visiting a/c with two wounded aboard prang on the drome here - fortunately after all but one of our hites were down. He - U-Unde - diverted to Fiskerton.

Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>

Ops laid on again tonight - late take off this time - about 0030 in the morning. Met the lads just going down to buses as I came back here. The battle order looks very small compared with recent efforts - still our losses have been very heavy recently so that is hardly surprising. Hope things are better than they were last night - one thing the weather has improved very considerably - should be alright if it stays like that. Now nearly 11 o'clock so must get to bed as I've to be up early. Just remembered - too late - why old Wells seemed so familiar when I came here - must have seen him in Wellingborough - that's his home town. Poor old Duncan - our coloured commission gunner - was one of Wells' crew last night - hadn't realised it at the time.

Dec. 4<sup>th</sup>

First A/C was back at seven o'clock this morning. We didn't hear about M-Mike until nearly 9 o'clock - were just beginning to think he was a goner when news came through that he had landed at Woodbridge, in Sussex, with his A/C shot about a bit and his mid-upper gunner wounded - not seriously. The target was Leipzig and it seems to have been a pretty good bang. No losses for the Squadron either - good blow.

No ops laid on for tonight so I went with Griffin to the crash of C-Charlie at Gamston. Open two-seater car and bloody cold! We set off shortly after eleven, had lunch at a pub at Marham Moor - very good pub - and arrived at the crash shortly before two. What a smash - the worst I've seen yet. The A/C apparently hit a tree on top of a hill, though God knows how, with his starboard tailplane, which is still wrapped round the tree. He then hit the ground about 20 yards further on and then began to come to pieces - small pieces first, engine cowlings and such like, then larger chunks, pieces of mainplane and in the next field pieces of the fuselage, propellers, dinghies and God knows what else. The pilots' cockpit ~~was~~ yet a third field and the engines in the fourth. Impossible to imagine anybody coming alive out of such a crash - yet one is still living. Two of the original survivors died shortly after they were found, ~~the~~ one died in hospital and there is still the one survivor. Our route was pretty abortive - the radio equipment was just smashed to bits. Got back to camp at 5.30. Not thawed out yet.

Dec. 5<sup>th</sup>

No ops tonight. Is this the beginning of the moon period? or don't we have such things any more. Anyway a fantastically busy day - just one of those days. Defect report on Q-Queen's Type 52 Resistance, amplifying report on T-Tig's intercomm. failure, Crystal return to Waddo, Group want to know about the star-gunner microphone heater, Group want to know about the number of modified Marconi receivers we have, Waddington want to know about something else, Raid assessment committee at 15.30 - Telephone rings all day. Damn all higher headquarters!

Dec 6<sup>d</sup>

No ops again tonight. Heavy mist all day which got very thick at about four o'clock. Run over to Waddington with S and C documents in the afternoon - H.T. driver who couldn't drive and thick fog made it a very pleasant journey indeed. Went down to the local with blamock after dinner.

Dec 7<sup>d</sup>

No ops tonight. Kill of a lot of correspondence to deal with today. G.P.O. also around - which took up quite some time. G.C. dropped in for a few words after lunch - good type. Spent quite some time chasing Works for the remainder of material for the new PBX. Getting nowhere fast. It's a big help, too, when sections move without giving any indication that they are going to move. Went with the G.P.O. bloke to station tomorrow to survey the line for their phone and found they don't live there any more. Good show!

Dec 8<sup>d</sup>

Still no ops. Day spent in trying to get my new PBX built and in doing amendments to S & C. I'll be very glad when I get a proper clerk - I'll be able to do some real work then. Hear my Christmas leave is to be approved.

Dec 9<sup>d</sup> - 13<sup>d</sup>

No ops. Clerk arrived finally - good girl, too. She doesn't know the ropes yet but shall be "bang-on" when she does. Most of my time spent in organising many things I've be waiting to organise as soon as a clerk appears.

Dec 14<sup>d</sup>

5 Groy signals conference. Beautiful day - very cold and foggy. Due to go off on 9 o'clock bus. No sign of bus so I ordered special transport. Bus turned up at 0945 - before special transport - so I went by bus. Arrived at Waddington at 1025 - S/ldr Ward, of course had gone. Organised transport for myself to Moreton Hall - motor cycle combination! By God! was it cold? Everywhere I over lapped, which was considerable, I was covered in frost as thick as snow. Finally arrived at Moreton Hall at 11.30 - 1 hr late. Conference quite interesting. Rumours of day and night operations in the near future - new sin-engined bombers - and very big things to come in the next four months. Conference finished at 4 o'clock. Back to Waddington with S/ldr Ward in his open sports car - Bunk! Van from Waddington - Sandrey but had to open windows

after about two miles as it was freezing over every hundred yards or so. Finally arrived back colder than I can ever remember being before. Had dinner, went to my bunk, drew up fire until the stove was red hot & stoked until I couldn't bear to be within six feet of the stove. Then piled up everything I possibly could on the bed and went to bed. Woke up warm. Forgot to mention that coming back from Waddington (the journey) took 1hr 20mins and we only avoided going in the dykes by the driver leaning out on one side and myself leaning out on the other. Hope they choose a better day for the next conference!

Dec 15<sup>th</sup>

Little no ops. Still very cold and foggy but cleared a bit later in the day. Fitters and riggers had a party and wanted the amplifier - amplifier ops, no emission from the rectifier valves - no spare valves. Manufactured a mock-up amplifier - finished at 2000hrs. What a life! Also heard we've got the Watch office installation to rebuild by 18<sup>th</sup>!

Dec 16<sup>th</sup>

Ops tonight. Take off 16<sup>00</sup> to the big city. Maximum effort - winter aircraft scheduled to take off. To make matters more difficult the P/O. arrive to work on the new operations switch board. P/ut Car, S.E.O. is not prepared to let them work in the operations room when the gen is coming through. Unreasonable - it will be his own fault if the work he wants done is delayed - but I suppose I shall have to carry the can all the same if it isn't done. Take-off is a bit of a fiasco. As usual after a long stand-down quite a number of snags develop - principally in connection with bombing-up. None of the aircraft take-off at the proper time, the first aircraft being thirteen minutes late. Three of the aircraft haven't bombed-up in time to take off at all so only thirteen go. Unlucky number! and events prove it to be so this time. Done back at 2325, at just after 2300 I get a call to say that the watch-office TR 1196 is out of action. Wash down to watch office to find that power is off. On changing to batteries there is still no joy. Test power supplies and find batteries are still down. Bad maintenance! Words with the mechanic tomorrow! Change aces and all is well - but we've missed the first op which has had to land by Aldis lamp. Bad show. Only nine a/c get back - two have landed away and two are missing B and Y - P/O Black and P/O Bayldon. Very sorry about young Bayldon - he was a very nice, quiet, clean, fair haired, slight youngster, who looked much too frail to handle a Lancaster. He regarded me as a sort of father confessor, brought his troubles to me. Poor kid - he can't have been more than 25. Finally got to bed

just before 3 o'clock in the morning.

Dec 17<sup>th</sup>

No ops tonight. Quite a lot to do in connection with G.P.O. work etc. Also we had the usual Raid Assessment Committee. The poor old ammunition officer, Ho Wright, caught it pretty well in the neck over the a/c not being bombed up last night. Also had an inquest into the affair of "i" which I forgot to mention yesterday. As a result of the delay in finishing the bombing up it was impossible to "det" up the Radar equipment until the last moment. In 4 the Radar mechanic got in, did his tests at the back of the aircraft, then walked forward to get the pilot to push his buttons to test the circuit. Unfortunately, the W/O, following the Mechanic into the a/c, inserted the detonator, so when the Pilot did press his buttons, bang! and up went the I.F.F. Still, the a/c took off without I.F.F. and completed his mission successfully. Heard also today that B-Baker called up on the R/T twice last night, was heard and answered but did not acknowledge, so he must have crashed somewhere either in this country or in the sea not far away. Wonder if there'll be any more ops. Went to bed very early and got a good ten hours sleep. Funny thing, but missing sleep now, when it is only irregular, makes me far more tired than it did when it was almost nightly on ~~the~~ summer.

Dec 18<sup>th</sup>

No ops again tonight. Nothing outstanding to report. A sort of Saturday feeling in the air anyway. My Christmas leave is approved, that's one thing. God, I'll be glad to have a week with Anne and the brain.

May 5<sup>th</sup> 1944

Received word during the night that I am posted to R.A.F. Chigwell - to proceed immediately and arrive not later than A.M. 10<sup>th</sup>

May 9<sup>th</sup>

A hectic day getting cleared, packed, and ready for off. Got away about 3 o'clock and managed to organise a lift to Lincoln. Caught 4 o'clock train and managed a night at home on way down.

May 10<sup>th</sup>

Arrived at R.A.F. Chigwell. First person I met was the C.O. Group Captain Messenger - my first C.S.O. at Brampton in late 1941. Nobody knows very much about us - 10 of us have arrived here under similar circumstances - lastly porting with no time to do anything - but it seems that we are 4 EAF here we Pool - relieved for the invasion when it comes.

May 12<sup>th</sup> - June 2<sup>nd</sup>

Basic training - rifle shooting, revolvers, gas masks, sten  
etc., etc., moved under canvas on May 26<sup>th</sup>.

June 3<sup>rd</sup> - June 12<sup>th</sup>

Diving instruction - bags of diving of 15 cut and  
3 ton bombs through the streets of London - good fun.

June 6<sup>th</sup>

Wakened at about four o'clock this morning by a vast  
armada of planes going overhead. The roar of endless  
aircraft continued up to about 7 o'clock. Guessed then that  
the invasion had started - found out during the morning  
that such was indeed the case. Successful landings made  
by British, Canadian, and American forces on the coast  
of Normandy, strangely enough the only bit of the French  
coast I know anything about. Riva Bella is right in  
the middle of things. Everyone has a great air of expectancy,  
newspapers are grabbed as soon as they appear. The general  
idea seems to be 'now it won't be long'. Let's hope they are  
right.

June 15<sup>th</sup>

Doug, Wank and I saw our first 'Doodle bug' just before  
midnight, walking back to camp from Chigwell station the rains  
went. A few minutes later we heard the roar of an approaching  
plane, as we thought, and also heavy ack-ack fire. Then an  
aircraft, flying very low and with a very peculiar engine  
note, came into sight corered by searchlights and with the  
ack-ack batteries passing him on from one to the other. The  
tail had a very bright light in it and we thought the  
aircraft was on fire. He flew right over our heads and  
over the camp. Doug and I both hoping all the time  
that he would be shot down. Knowing what we know now  
thank god he wasn't. Had he been either we, or the  
camp, or both, would have had it.

June 17<sup>th</sup>

Station Duty Officer. Doodle bugs coming over in large  
numbers. I was plotting from 1700 hours until 0500 hours  
the following morning. Fortunately for us all were well  
South of us. Also large numbers apparently being shot  
down & few are reaching London.

June 17<sup>th</sup> - July 15<sup>th</sup>

Kicking our heels at Chigwell. No work. On six hours notice to move so no leave and practically no days off. Life very simple - get up, breakfast, wash, shave, dress. Walk over the fields to the village for coffee back in time for lunch. Lazy away the afternoon or go driving with the new courses. Flash, dance, show or local in evenings. Life punctuated at frequent intervals by doodle-bugs. Most amusing night a cricket match - doodle bug goes over - no notice taken - shower starts & everybody runs for shelter!

July 2<sup>nd</sup> - lunch time

Our nearest escape from the doodle-bug. One landed just by the school about 300 yards from the officers mess. Wrecked the school lodge and one wing of the school, blew windows out of the officer's mess, bent hangars. I was walking through one of the hangars when bomb went off - hangar seemed to shake itself then deafeningly crump! No other sensation.

July 13<sup>th</sup>

Reported at lunch time we are off overseas - not to Normandy but to M.E. I immediately packed and made arrangements to get away. Travelled up to Preston by night train - managed to get a sleeper - very lucky. Home by just after seven in the morning.

July 15<sup>th</sup>

Reported to West Kirby in afternoon. Kitted out in evening.

July 16<sup>th</sup>

Boarded ship early this morning. Dutch H.V. of about 18000 <sup>5000 tons</sup> <sup>displacement</sup> Not a bad looking vessel - newly done up. Sleeping quarters very cramped - 15 officers to one cabin. Men packed in like sandwiches between decks. Food good but not very plentiful. Rumours as to where we are going rife but general opinion seems to be Italy. We'll see! Did not sail today.

July 17<sup>th</sup>

Moved down river in evening. Anchored at river mouth. Most exasperating to be able to watch people enjoying themselves at New Brighton and not be able to join them. Even more exasperating

to realise that Blackpool lies only a few miles off our starboard beam and yet I can't get ashore and join Anne and Patricia for a few final hours.

July 18<sup>th</sup>

On our way - we weighed anchor shortly after lunch, ran out into the channel, formed in convoy and set off about tea time. Just before dusk we saw Wren on our starboard beam and before it was completely dark passed between Antoin and the Mull of Galloway. Much singing by the troops before we went to bed.

July 19<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>

Blue skies, a blue and amazingly calm Atlantic and nothing else. I never thought the Atlantic could be so quiet. Not a ripple and hardly any swell. If the convoy did not change course occasionally, so altering the arrangement of the ships, it would be difficult to believe we were moving at all. Temperature gradually getting hotter and hotter. We went into Tropical hit on 25<sup>th</sup>. Nights in the cabin almost unbearable. Suffered to sleep in our clothes but no one can stand it. Daily routine - Breakfast - stroll round deck - censor letters - write - lunch - read or deck or sleep in cabin - deck tennis - tea - read or write - walk round deck - poker - breath of fresh air before retiring to the Black Hole to sleep. Boat drill daily - mosquito nets and cream issued. Rumour had it that we should pass Gibraltar tonight (26<sup>th</sup>) but no sign.

July 27<sup>th</sup>

Great excitement on board today. Everyone convinced we pass Gib tonight. Just before nightfall sighted large convoy on horizon - joined them. Towards midnight sighted lights ahead. Spain on our left, North Africa on our right. Saw the lights of Gib just before going to bed. If everybody gets as excited as this just to see land what will it be like when it is England, we see again?

July 25<sup>d</sup> & 29<sup>d</sup>.

In the morning just blue sky and blue sea again, as though Gibe had never been. North African coast came into sight later. Continued to sail along close to shore until afternoon of 29<sup>d</sup>. Passed most of the towns made famous by the 1<sup>st</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> armies. In afternoon of 29<sup>d</sup> parted from rest of convoy and turned north. So it is Italy!

July 30<sup>d</sup>.

Just before lunch Capri was sighted on the horizon. A memorable event. People could hardly tear themselves away from the rails to have lunch. Passed Capri, very close