

THE DIARY OF AN AIRMAN.

This is the diary of an airman who was reported missing after a raid on Mailly-le-camp, France on May 3 & 4th. 1944.

His name is Flight Sgt. John Pittwood who was the Navigator of a Lancaster Bomber.

The pilot Leslie Lizetts (Liz) who was a New Zealander and the rear gunner, Ron Ellis were still in the aircraft when it crashed and both were killed.

The mid gunner Ron Emery (Curly) was burned very badly about the face attempting to rescue the rear gunner who was trapped in his gun turret.

He dropped in the same field as Jack and he arrived back in England a few weeks after him.

The wireless operator and the Engineer got back to England after the liberation of France but unfortunately the Engineer has since died.

It has since been learned that the bomb aimer was taken P.O.W. but he is now back in England. (9th May 1945).

Warrant Officer J. Pittwood

3rd 1944. Left base at 10-30pm. for attack on Camp Mailly, crossed English coast at Beechy Head at 11-05pm. expecting to cross back home two hours later. Crossed enemy coast at 11-15pm. arrived over base at exactly midnight. An aircraft goes up in front of us on bombing range, flack starts to come close just as Wes closes the bomb doors and Liz puts aircraft into weave. At 12-10am. the port outer engine is set on fire by flack, the order to feather is given but at first the fire refused to douse so Liz gave orders to put on chutes. Later Nick managed to put out fire and we set off for home. Just as we turned onto course fighters came in on us so we abandoned plane at 12-40am.

May 4th.

I landed lightly in a ploughed field surrounded on three sides by woods and by a road on the fourth. I had not seen any other chutes on the way down and was surprised to see Curly come over to me, he asked me what his face looked like and what I intended to do. I told him to get rid of his chute harness and may west as we were going to make a run for it. We made for the woods and someone called to us, wether he was French or German we dont know and we didnt stop to ask. Gerry must have known that we were arround as serchlights were being played across the ground. Once in the woods we decided to move south and get as far away from the aircraft as possible, so guided by the stars we started our first trek towards freedom. The woods were thick and we got covered with scratches but they gave us a first class cover and they lasted for several miles. We eventually came to a clearing and found ourselves along side a railway, it was as light as day and I kept praying that clouds would cover the moon but no such luck. A train was in sight heading north so we lay low at the edge of the forest, our hearts beating like thunder, and every snap of a twig sounded like an explosion. As soon as the train had passed we crossed the rails, we

Cont. were on a swamp plain and our only way for the next few miles was along the main road so we disguised our uniform as much as possible, buying Curlys outer suit in a well and once again started walking. It was now three o'clock and we were begining to feel a little more settled and away from the first hue and cry and Jerry wouldnt start a proper serch until morning, so we decided to get as far as possible before five and then find a hiding place for the day. We walked on through a small village, every dog was barking and scaring us to death. Then we approached a town and from the notices on the toll we found out that it was Ferriers. We skirted the town, later to find out that it was a German garrison town, so it was lucky for us that we did not go through. Five o'clock us by a river on the S.E. of the town, so we purified some water and ate a little chocolate and some horlicks tablets, we then lay under the edge to sleep remaining there all day. We were going to carry on walking the following evening but as Curly was in pain we didnt get very far.

May 5th.

I decided to try a farm to get help for Curly, at first the farmer did not like the idea but after a short while he decided to let us stay in the barn as long as we didnt stay more than one day. He gave us some wine and some bread and what was most welcome something to bath Curlys face. We stayed in the barn that night and the following day but I got little sleep as one of us had to be on watch and Curly was to ill and was best asleep.

May 6th.

We decided to move just after midnight as it was obvius that Curlys face wanted treating by a doctor. We went back to the main road towards Ferriers and called at a big house on the outskirts of the town. They gave us more wine and bread and jam, by this time we were begining to feel hungry as our last

on Cont. meal had been supper on the on the 3rd. except for a few odds and ends. The old lady informed us that Ferriers was a garrison town and that the doctor would probably hand us over, but 17 Kilometers down the road was La Selle de Bain where the doctor would help us, so off we set for La Selle. We had to travel along the road and it was beginning to get light and were still in uniform, we passed several French men going to work but no one stopped us. On approaching La Selle we met a wood man who gave us a drink of cognac and told us to go on a little further and call at another house. After being passed through several houses at each of which we had either wine or cognac. We were eventually taken into the village and by this time all the inhabitants knew we were here and we became the object of a crowd of sightseers. The doctor told us to wait in the cemetery where a school teacher, the first English speaking person we had met asked us a few questions and then took us to a barn. The doctor dressed Curlys face and after our identity discs told us that we should be taken to the Marquis that evening. The villagers brought us plenty of food and drink and we really ended our hunger. At about 10pm. that night the school teacher and another French man returned and gave us a revolver and a cloak and then took us to the school house where we had our first French coffee (our first warm drink). They explained to us that we had about 12 Kilometers to go and were taken to a farm. They took us into a back room where there was already a French boy who was on the run from the Gestapo, we were given a good meal and for the first time in four days we were able to get proper sleep.

May 7th.

After a French breakfast of coffee and rolls we were given civilian clothes and our uniforms etc. were buried and another farmer who was presumably the local boss came to see us and

cont. Dr.Salmon came to see Curly.

8th.& 9th. The doctor decided that his daily visits to see Curly would arouse suspicion so they decided to take him to the doctors house.Sebastian who later became my guide and Georges two students both able to speak English came to interrogate me and told me I should be leaving in two days time for Paris and that I should have to be ready to leave on the Friday.

May 10th. Uneventful.

May 11th.Thurs.Georges came for me on a motor bike and told me that we were not going direct to Paris as the train was controlled,i.e. passengers checked,but were going by bus to Sens from Montargy and going to Paris the following day.We went by motor bike to a house in Montargy where I was given an identity card and ration cards.After dinner we went to the bus station and it was here that I came into contact with German troops for the first time and I cant not say that I felt happy because they were waiting for the same bus as we were.You can imagine how relieved I was to get off that bus at Sens,of all my experiences I think that ride was the worst.As we walked through Sens I seemed to think that every German soldier must recognize me and it was not for quite a few days that I began to cease being afraid. We stayed the night in Sens at a school teachers house.

May 12th. We went by train to Paris Garde L'Est by tube to Garre de
(Ritas Birthday) Lion,the tube is always full of German soldiers and here . I made my first boob,I knocked down a German rifle and picking it up I said "Sorry"but luckily he didnt catch on. We then went by train to Lagny,where I was to stay untill May 26th.Sebastian took me to a house where I met the local resistance chief another school teacher and was then taken

- 12th.cont.to the next village where I met Sgt.John Pearce a rear
gunner also shot down at Mailly.It was grand to talk to
an Englishman.Later I was taken to 13 Rue de la Paix,
Lagny,Seine et Marne,where I met Marguerite and Bert
Cane,Mdme Rheti and the two girls M and Mdme Boutte
were also there.We had a good talk with Bert doing all
the translating.I was given some new clothes and was able
to have a bath,I was shown my bedroom which was next to
the nursery and had a big French window looking onto the
woods and my instructions were that in any emergency I was
to go into the woods.
- May 13th. Had my first visit to Paris where I met Georges,saw Notre
Dame,Les Invalides and saw for the first time German horse
drawn traffic which reminded me of the films of the Civil
War.The Americans bombed Orly.Sebastian told me that Curlys
face was healing quickly and he was returning to the farm
at La Choppilles.
- May 14th. Went to Bampar to see Sgt.Pearce spent the morning on the
Marne and chopping wood for the bakery,this exercise was
very welcome.We went for a drink with John and the Captain,
the bar was full of Luftwaffe personel but captain didnt
seem to worry.
- May 15th. Went to the Cinema with Marguerite and Mdme Rheti.
- May 16th. S/Ldr.Sparks controöler at Mailly came to Dampar.We went for
a drink together.Hank shot down from Thunderbolt,stays in
Lagny.Cafe Yoche is becoming quite allied.John,Sparks and
Mdme Boutte came to No.13.Later a French man who had been in
prison with came to stop with us.Chief came to see me and he
introduced me to the Gardener who was a member of the

th cont. underground, this was the first time that he knew we were in the house, neither did he know what Cane was.

- May 17th. Attended a conference of the local F.F.I. at the school house. I was informed that at a minutes notice an army of 10,000 men all armed could be raised in the Paris, Seine et Marne area. This little party was a credit to any country The Chief, his wife, Bert, Sebastian, two more boy students and two girl students discussed supply, dropping what arms and ammo were needed, distribution of weapons and technical points of new weapons. The girls spoke like experienced armourers. These were the first indications that final preparations were being made for the invasion.
- May 18th-22nd. Remained at No. 13, and saw John each night.
- May 23rd. Rosie came to see us and gave us the Gen about the second front. She also told us that they were trying to arrange for an A/C or boat to pick us up.
- May 24th. Agent disappears after landing by air from London so plans are altered and we are to go into Spain.
- May 25th. John Sparks and I go to Paris and wait for Rosie in the park near to Garre de L'Est. We were then taken to Georges where we did another sight seeing tour, we were introduced to an officer of the Paris Gendarmerie, the men who led the barricades battles.
- May 26th. We met at Petaine school where 7 Yanks and 6 English men were given new identity cards and Railway travel permits. We were to catch the 9-30 train from Paris to Toulouse and from there by local train to Pau where we are to wait on some open ground near the station untill we are picked up. (this was to be the worst journey I have ever had) We split up into twos

th.cont.and made our way to the station.Luckily by this time we had begun to disregard the Germans.When we arrived at the station we found that our train was in and it was fairly crowded and once again we began to feel uncomfortable. We were expecting to be on the train anything from twenty four to fourty eight hours and on the train were thirteen people who couldnt talk French so we would just have to hope that no one would try to make conversation with us.We stayed in the corridors and although we kept in twos and threes I felt that it must be obvious that we were a party and the way we wispered to one another must have seemed suspicious. There were many "German Soldiers,Sailors and Luftwaffe on the platform.The rear of our train was a troop train and the train opposite was going to the west coast and was mainly loaded with troops.They would walk up and down the platform yelling at porters and pushing aside any Frenchman who happened to be in the way and the Frenchmen after looking around would spit at them after they had passed.Eventually at about 8p.m.we left Paris and about an hour later we reached Juvessey which a month ago had been attacked by the R.A.F.and boy you would have to see it to believe it,I had seen Villeneuve St.George, La Chappelle,where twenty out of twenty three bridges had been knocked down and also Neusy La Lec which had been badly knocked about,but Juvessey beat the lot,it wasn't crators or broken tracks and smashed trains,it was one great tumult just like a garden after it had been dug over.It was four hours later before we left Juvessey.We were moved part way by electric train part way by steam and in the middle they borrowed the engine to shunt some goods waggons across.The French people seemed used to this they just got out of the train and strolled around untill the controller told them that we were moving.We took the opportunity of eating something.Eventually we started to move again so John and I lay in the corridor to get some sleep. It was just after we woke up that I had one of my greatest

choon. heartbeats, a Gendarme came over to me and asked me something in French all I caught was the end bit "La on La" and luckily I knew this meant there or there so I just pointed and said La and luckily I was right. We arrived at Toulouse at 7pm. on Saturday night and we had to change trains to reach our final destination which was Pau. On Toulouse station we had what I think was our last greatest real scare, we followed our Guide on to the electric trains and just as it was about to go out he found that it was the wrong train so we all got out and tore up the platform and for about a quarter of an hour we ran about trying to find our train. When we did get on the right train we found out that it was only going as far as Yrbes and at Yrbes a porter asked us for our tickets and started talking to us but luckily he was a friendly and he locked us in a room untill our right train did come in. In the morning from Yrbes we could see the Pyrennies clearly and they looked rather high to climb. We arrived at Pau and waited for our contacts as instructed and for the first time the whole thirteen, lucky thirteen for us, were together. We must have looked a sight we had eaten a boiled egg and two sandwiches in the last fourty eight hours, we were unshaven and hadnt had a wash, we were in old clothes and we were all very tired. After waiting for over two hours no contact had turned up so the Guides went out to see what had happened and it was another three hours before they came back so we all split up and I went into a nearby hotel with a fellow called Rosie.

May 27th.

We all met again and went to a farm about four miles out of town and stayed in a disused house. It was here that we got to know about each other, Sparks Johny Ginger and myself were all from the Mailly raid, Rhodesia a Typhoon pilot who had crash landed only a few days ago, Junior, Canack and Bill had bailed out about the same time as I had, this was all the R.A.F. boys. Hank Dillinger had been in France about 15 months and twice

cont. ran out by the Gestapo, he was called Dillinger because of his hunted look, Rebel a southerner who was knocked down in his first flight from a Mustang, Lucky and Harry were from Fortresses and Slim was from a Liberator. Although it had been planned that there should be no waiting in Pau I think that these few days together did us a lot of good, it gave us some much needed rest and enabled us to get to know each other. We were here four days and spent the time telling experiences playing cards and preparing as well as possible for our climb, we washed our clothes and several changed shoes to get the best fit. Our food was brought up from the farm and although it was very rough we ate well. We cleared the house out and lay on straw and apart from complaints of mice running around we all slept very well. There were plenty of cherries to be picked and we also drank our first mountain water. Rosie and a Frenchman came to see us and brought us some Lucky Strike cigarettes, Cognac and some cube sugar.

May 31st.

We left the Farm in small parties for Pau where we were to catch a bus to Lasserex where taxis would take us to the point where we were to start our climb, when they said taxis we thought they had gone mad even in Paris a taxi was a museum piece, but somehow they had one waiting for us. We boarded the bus at Pau, I have never seen a bus so crowded, in this country conductors complain when there are five or six people standing, but this was a thirty two seater single decker bus inside there were about forty five people and there were inbetween twenty and thirty people on top and behind there was a pig cart which some passengers had hitched on, there were even people riding on that. The bus was driven by coke and every time it hit a bump we left red hot coke lying on the road. The conductor knew who we were and he was to open the rear door when we arrived at a given place, by the time we were to leave I think everyone knew who we were

c. Cont. and they were saying "bonne Chane" and "bonne Voyage" as we left the bus. Six of us got into the taxis and we went about fifteen miles to the foot of the Pyrenees and then it went back for the others. We had food for two days two boiled eggs each about a pound of bread each and a pound of chocolate between us, we also had a little meat and cheese. We ate a boiled egg between two and a little bread and we all had a drink of Cognac. It was now ten o'clock and we were to move as soon as it got dark at about midnight and the first night should take us past the German first frontier posts and our danger would then be patrols of dogs and men. Our party consisted of one guide one Frenchman, Charles who had been told to go over with us as his time was up in Paris, seven English men and six Yanks. We left at midnight and for about six miles followed the road and then we took to the fields, we had to cover twenty miles the first night but it wasn't bad going and we reached our shelter at about five o'clock in the morning, it was an old cowshed. We were just past the frontier posts but the shed was in full view of them and we were not allowed outside at all. If everything had gone well we should have had ten hours the following night and then there would be four hours the evening after, but the mountains which had for weeks been clear became cloud covered and it started to pour with rain. When darkness came we all cut ourselves sticks and started again, and to make things worse we had our first range before us, the tracks had become marl and instead of doing five or six miles an hour we were doing from 200 to 400 yards. We were soon covered in mud and we were drenched to the skin. The top of the ridge brought us no respite as the desert was even worse, we slipped time and time again but by keeping together we prevented anyone one from slipping down the hill. At three o'clock we came to a hut and as we had no chance of reaching the next shelter we decided to pack in and stay there for the day. I doubt if we could have gone much

farther anyhow and I was glad of the rest, and Dille who in his fifteen months of captivity had had very little exercise was in a very weak state. We had very little food and the guide went to see if he could get any. He was unsuccessful at first but later he managed to get a can of soup which was warm and was very welcome, we ate a little bread with it and this left us with two eggs and a little meat paste and about a pound of bread but we still had some sugar and cognac and luckily we decided to keep this as long as we could. We were very uncomfortable here so as soon as it began to get dusk we started to move on again. Charles who had done a lot of mountaineering helped Dille along, the rain had stopped but we were still in the misty wet bottom of the clouds and the climbing got stiffer but we knew that once we were over this lot we should not be long before getting back to Blighty. We came to an almost vertical bank of clay which seemed impossible to climb but the guide got up and tied a rope to a tree and we were soon moving ahead again. We found a few cherries and there was plenty of water to drink. We rested the next day at a goatsmans hut and the following night we reached what should have been our shelter the second night. Several times we heard dogs barking but never saw anything of a patrol. The fifth night was fairly level going but owing to the mist we were very slow and we moved in crocodile fashion. We stumbled quite a few times and each time I managed to put my hand on nettles, we also crossed several streams but now we were so wet that we just waded through them, then we came to a river with two or three farm houses alongside and from the bushes the guide swung a kind of bridge across it was rather flimsy but it got us across. Later we reached a hut and stayed there, we now had one more ridge to cross. We chopped up the last egg and had this to eat with some meat paste.

6 th. June. We started out just after midnight but the going wasnt rough it was grass, fairly steep and slippery and perhaps because it

...e.cont.was the last lap it seemed to go on for ever.We crossed the first boundry at 4-15am.we were now in no mans land and at 6-10am.we crossed into Spain.We were now decending but the mist was freezing on our clothes and although it was June snow was falling.We found a little hut,lit a fire and dried our clothes a little and then pushed off towards the nearest village.Hank Junior Lucky and I went on ahead and were going fine even the sun was begining to shine.From behind the hedges there came two soldiers with guns we thought they were jerries but they turned out to be Spaniards,they lit us a fire and we waited for the rest.We were then taken to ISABA where we were taken to jail and they promised us a meal and about two hours later they came in with a great bowl of potatoes and a spoon each,but it was very welcome.

June 7th. We were taken by bus to Pamplona where we were handed over to the consul and then to the Spanish Air Force.Afterwards we were sent to the British Embassy in Madrid,I shall never forget that journey on account of the beggars asking for food or money.I have never seen so many poor people,that is fascism for you,everything for the few.We were given some money and we stayed at an hotel. The food was awful everything was floating in olive oil,we showed the cheff how to make cherry pie.Later we went to a Bull fight and nearly caused a riot because we would not give the Fascist salute.The Spaniards were not very friendly to us.After a time we were sent to Gibraltar and eventually we got a plane home.

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