



THE KRIEGIE

NEWS-SHEET OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCES EX-P.O.W. ASSOCIATION

Volavimus
Vecdidimus
Vivimus

Editor: CAL YOUNGER

N° 47 DECEMBER 2002

THE MEMORIAL TAKES SHAPE



Sculptor Pam Taylor with her maquette

Thanks to Maurice Butt's unflagging efforts, despite his indifferent health, we have raised £28,350 for the **Royal Air Forces Prisoners of War Memorial Trust**. About two thirds has been donated by members of the Association, including widows – who have been more than generous, though some we know could ill afford it. We received a wonderful gift of £2,500 from the Lashenden Air Warfare Museum, our long-term benefactor, and a grant of £2,500 from the Esmée Fairbairn Charitable Trust, negotiated by our President, who has also persuaded contributions from several other sources.

The Hilden Charitable Fund, of which Cal Younger is a trustee, has donated £2,000 and £1,000 has come from The Robertson Trust in Glasgow. Some small trusts and businesses, especially in Maurice's own area, have also been generous. Ceridwen Lewis, widow of Alex, sent £100 being the proceeds from a cake stall she stocked from her own and her daughter's kitchens and ran as part of the Jubilee celebrations.

We have also received handsome contributions from Canada, which are not included in the total given above.

THE MEMORIAL

Pam Taylor, a distinguished sculptor, whose work includes the Royal and Allied Air Forces Memorial which stands on Plymouth Hoe and the bust of Sir Arthur Harris displayed at the RAF museum at Hendon, is now working on our memorial, which will depict a kriegie, on a forced winter march, trudging through the snow, dragging his sledge behind him. Using her husband as a model, Pam produced a maquette. This put the idea into three dimensions and enabled us to advise on detail. Initially she had to rely on guesswork to some extent.

She has now completed another maquette, incorporating our suggestions, and is now engaged upon the statue itself. This will be cast in bronze and is to be sited in a new section of the RAF Museum. Until now, kriegies have been under-represented at the Museum, but that will be put right when the new area is complete. It was intended originally that the statue should be life-size, but the site does not allow of this and the work will be three-quarter size.

Funds raised to date are sufficient to meet the sculptor's fee, plus the cost of casting the piece and its conveyance to the site. We estimate that about another £20,000 will be needed, of which £13,000 will be required for the plinth, for engraving and for installation (a crane will have to be hired). Maintenance and various other costs account for the balance. As expected, money is coming in more slowly now, but there are other sources to explore and we hope, too, that members who have made donations might consider a further gift.

GIFT AID

As most people are aware, charities can claim from the Inland Revenue 28 pence on each £1 given under the Gift Aid scheme. All you need do to enable us to claim that tax refund is to sign a Gift Aid form. The form states simply that you wish any donation you have made to the Memorial Trust and any you may make in future to be treated as Gift Aid.

If you pay tax and have made a donation to the Trust, no matter what the amount, please obtain a form by writing to Cal Younger at Mill House, Great Bedwyn, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 3LY.

This could bring in several more thousands of pounds

RECCO REPORT

The Kriegie's computer boffin, TED CACHART, featured on two pages of *Royal Force News* in May. Early in 1941 Ted called into an RAF recruiting office and obtained an application form.

He persuaded a priest to witness Ted's father's signature though Ted had yet to induce his father to sign. He told the priest that the form simply ensured that he would enter the service of his choice – the RAF – when his call-up came. His father was similarly persuaded and Ted posted the form.

He was called up for a medical in April and in May reported for aircrew selection. He was sworn in at Reading and placed on the reserve list. He was still only fifteen. In September, barely sixteen, Ted received his papers and was instructed to report to Padgate. "My father gave me a hard time but eventually relented," Ted says. Before he was eighteen he was posted to 49 Squadron.

Another article described how two Lancasters collided over the target area on a Berlin raid on 2/3 January 1944. Ted was in one of them. The whole crew baled out and were captured. The four NCOs went to Stalag 4B but Ted was recalled to Dulag Luft for further interrogation and then sent to Stalag Luft 6. He did not see his crew-mates until the end of the War. *Royal Air Force News* also told the story of his meeting with Bill Watkins who had been one of the WAAF's who welcomed returning kriegies. Along among them. This story appeared in *The Kriegie* two years ago.

Desmond Plunkett, who died in February 2002, aged 86, was the head mapmaker for the Escape Committee at Stalag Luft III. Within days of joining 218 Squadron, he was shot down, in June 1942. Plunkett made several attempts to escape. Once, with another kriegie, he buried himself in ash in a cart which was removing ash from the camp. Unfortunately, there were still burning embers in the ash and their trousers caught fire. Eventually, Roger Bushell told him to concentrate on map making. His team produced about 2,500 maps in five colours, plus forged passes and other documents needed for the Great Escape.

Plunkett was 13th out of the tunnel, reached the Austrian border, was arrested and grilled by the Gestapo. They sent him to a prison in Prague but eventually he went to Stalag Luft I, where he was liberated. Plunkett stayed in the RAF for two years then began a new career as a survey pilot in India and Africa. Retiring from flying in 1975, he took up beekeeping but finally settled in England in the late 1990s.

Ernie McConchie

As a young man Mac was recognised as a top New Zealand gymnast and sportsman, and his entire life centred around fitness.

Joining the RNZAF, he trained as Air Observer early in the war and was posted, with an English crew, to 150 Squadron. Brought down in Holland in 1941, he was sent to Stalag IIIA and was one of 52 mass-escapers. He was at large for over a month, with his portrait on "WANTED" posters throughout the Reich.

At Sagan, Heydekrug and Fallingbommel his group of four gymnasts, including himself, could be observed practising elaborate balancing acts. While on the march from Fallingbommel towards Lubek his column was strafed by a Spitfire, resulting in the death of twenty PoWs. Later, hungry marchers came upon a dead horse, which was cut up for cooking with a dagger Mac had taken from a dead Luftwaffe officer found in a bomb crater. Subsequently, the dagger was used at his wedding to Eileen to cut the wedding cake.

Returning to New Zealand with his English wife, he became traffic manager with the Steamship Company of Wellington, remaining with the company until retirement, when he moved to Surfers Paradise in Queensland. He lived there until his death aged 93.

Many kriegies will recall, and be grateful, for his contribution to camp entertainment. His puckish humour and shrewd, sparkling eyes will be remembered with affection. Mac's daughter Daryl and her husband live in Great Yarmouth.

Bob Coles

THE LARRY SLATTERY MEMORIAL FUND

Huw is a Welsh boy for whom I would predict a scintillating future. In 1997, when Huw was nine, his mother wrote to see if we could help with his course fees for the National Children's Orchestra. He had already passed, with distinction, Grade 5 Piano, Grade 5 Trumpet, Grade 5 Theory and Grade 4 violin. We made a grant and after that Huw took charge of correspondence himself. In the past five years we have received many, very long letters, written with such maturity and such felicity that one might have believed his future lay in literature.

But for Huw music is everything. At ten he passed Grade 8 piano and at eleven he passed Grade 8 trumpet and was promoted to the under-13 National Children's Orchestra. He competed in Welsh festivals, winning numerous prizes for trumpet and piano. In a competition in Cardiff he won a cash prize and used it to buy football boots. He even gave a recital in which he played piano, trumpet and violin. Last year, aged 13, he joined the National Youth Orchestra of Wales and gained A* in GCSE French. This year he is playing in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, including a proms performance under Sir Simon Rattle. He has also taken GCSE Biology, Chemistry and Physics – two years in advance. In September he is to begin at Chetham's School of Music.

Huw's list of musical activities seems endless, but they are costly for the family and his father does two jobs. We have helped this year, for the fifth time, with a grant of £200.

David, a Devonian, is also 14, talented but not quite in the same league as Huw. His instrument is the violin and he has attained Grade 6. Recently he passed Grade 2 piano and is to take Grade 5 theory shortly. His violin teacher is a former Navy bandmaster. David's parents lost their only son four years before David was born. His father has been on incapacity benefit for many years. At the age of ten, realising that his parents couldn't cope with the expense of his musical education, David persuaded them to allow him to busk on Saturday mornings. The youngest busker in the country, he earned most of the £32 per week his music lessons were costing. His mother stood with him. Four years later he is still busking, but with school work and evening classes at Dartington, as well as his music lessons, he is glad of an occasional Saturday off. His mother helps hospital charities and David himself has performed many times in aid of charities. We are helping with his violin lessons.

These are two of the present beneficiaries of The Larry Slattery Memorial Fund. Over the years we have helped many talented and interesting young people. Only one has reached stardom to date. When Evelyn Glennie was sixteen, we subscribed a quarter of the cost of a xylophone. Most of our young beneficiaries have moved on and we have lost touch. No doubt many play in orchestras or teach music or sing in opera companies without being famous. Others have taken up other professions but still play for pleasure. One young lady is doing medicine but enjoys playing in chamber groups.

We have helped young musicians with fees for Saturday classes at the major music colleges, provided bursaries for music schools – Wells Cathedral School, Chethams and the Purcell School, contributed to the cost of private lessons and the purchase or hire of instruments. We believe that Larry Slattery would have been pleased with our efforts.

As the Larry Fund is too small to be listed in various directories, though details can be found on the Charity Commission website, most of the appeals are referred by a larger trust, which does not cater for individuals. Some come from the schools mentioned and some are by word of mouth. Although the Fund helped some older students in the early days, in recent years the Trustees have introduced an informal age limit of eighteen. Larry worked with talented children and for that reason the younger age group is given priority.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

It is worth recalling why and how the Larry Slattery Memorial Fund came into being. Most people will know that Larry was the first Kriegie and that he was the prime mover in establishing the Association as well as its first Secretary. Some may not know that he was an accomplished violinist and, had he wished, could have played professionally. In camp he was the Leader of Frank Hunt's Orchestra and he played in the barracks at night, saving the sanity of many.

After a stint with UNRA in Germany after the War, Larry joined the Civil Service and played in their orchestra. Occasionally he was called on by major orchestras when a violinist was needed at short notice. His great joy was to coach children's chamber groups. At his funeral in September 1972 a children's quartet played *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* to a hushed and deeply moved congregation. It was after his memorial service in St Clement Dunes months later that members began to murmur about a permanent memorial. After much thought, it was decided to establish a charitable foundation to help musically gifted young people, more especially children.

Enthusiastic donations poured in from members. Later the Fund received a share of the profits from reunions and from the splendid concerts organised by the late and much missed Vic Gammon. In 1989 the Larry Fund (as we know it) received a wonderful gift, which decided the Trustees not to spend out the capital after a few years but to keep the Fund going in perpetuity. Janey Shepherd, the very beautiful and talented daughter of Geoff, died of cancer in her early thirties. She asked that any donations in lieu of flowers should go to the Larry Fund. With the added proceeds of a memorial concert given by the Hatfield Symphony orchestra, of which Janey was a member, no less than £4,000 was raised, a testament to a sublime character.

In September 2001, following the death of Geoff Shepherd, the Larry Fund benefited by £1,100. Several years ago Geoff's son Ian and Frank Hunt's son Gordon became Trustees of the Fund. They, no doubt with other members of the next generation, will carry on the work in the spirit of Larry and Janey and, I would like to add, Frank Hunt.

In recent years, the Larry Slattery Memorial Fund has not attracted much in the way of donations from members. Last year, members, excluding trustees of the charity and those who contributed in memory of Geoff Shepherd, gave £44.50.

We believe this apparent indifference is due in a large measure to lack of publicity. It is a long time since an article such as this was published in *The Kriegie*. Members have contributed, both directly and indirectly, over the years and are entitled to know that scores of young musicians have been helped in the name of Larry Slattery. C.V.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR EXPERIENCE CENTRE By Paddy Hope

We read many articles in magazines, including our own *The Kriege*, about wartime exploits. Unfortunately, it is all too likely that most of these are not recorded elsewhere, though the Imperial War Museum has quite a lot on tape.

The Second World War Experience Centre exists to do just that. Based in Horsforth, Leeds, its aim is to collect as many of these stories as possible before it is too late, experiences not just of ex-service personnel but of anyone who lived through the war, in whatever capacity. Records of those who have passed on are also sought.

I am one of many volunteers, some veterans like myself, who give some of our time to help the project. Being ex-RAF, I work on RAF and WAAF records and memorabilia. Several thousand stories, in manuscript form or on tape, are already in the archives. We believe it is important that future generations should know of the part their families played in the six long years of war.

To quote from the Centre's leaflet: "The archive that is being preserved for posterity is international in scope, documenting both Allied and Axis experience. Whilst the key dates are 1939-45, the Centre also collects material documenting the build-up or aftermath of the Second World War. The rescue programme focuses on original wartime letters, diaries, artwork, photographs, maps, newspapers, books, official papers and three-dimensional material evoking the period. It also includes recollections by manuscript and typescript."

"Oral history evidence is an important aspect of the Centre's collections. Through an international network of volunteers we tape-record individuals' war memories from around the world. Invaluable as evidence, these interviews are also a fascinating accompaniment to documents and personal memorabilia."

I hope that members of the Association will take an interest in the project, become members if possible and contribute whatever items, such as are described above, to the Centre. For more information, including details of membership, please contact The Second World War Experience Centre, 5 Feast Field (off Town St.) Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4TJ. The Centre's website is www.war-experience.org

The Twilight Years

Some members are already in retirement homes, others prefer to stay put, but to any who may be contemplating a move into a retirement home Neil Ostrom strongly recommends Pegasus Retirement Homes. He is enjoying life at Pegasus Court, Chichester with an interesting group of neighbours and feels that the environment would appeal to Association members. Neil has no axe to grind but is simply anxious to put members on to a good thing. Pegasus has a number of developments, the latest being at Catterham, Surrey. Apartments are of several types and sizes.

Neil would be delighted for members who are, or may be, interested to get in touch with him.

The address is:

Apartment 19, Pegasus Court, Avenue de Chartres, Chichester PO19 1EA.

(Tel:01243 784 737 e-mail: neil@ostrom16.freemove.co.uk)

JOURNEY BACK IN TIME By Vitek Formanek

(A Czech aviation historian, Vitek has several times appeared in these pages for information. He describes himself as "a 38 year old RAF WWII nutter" and has written to many members some of whom have been a bit miffed by someone's revelation of their address. They can be assured that the requests for autographs, photographs etc. come from a genuine enthusiast. Recently Vitek visited this country and has asked that his story of the visit be published in this issue.)

In the first half of August I spent twelve days in England and it was a most memorable, action-packed stay. Arriving at Victoria Coach Station at 6.15am from Prague – not yet flooded – I was greeted by Mr John Elsom, who lives in South Africa. We went to the railway station for tea and cake. At 8am another Kriege, Mr Bill Stapleton, joined us and bought us a proper RAF breakfast. We had a lovely talk for the next two hours, then I had to leave them and head for Saffron Walden. Here I visited in hospital Mr Fred Browne, who escaped from march in winter 1945 and was helped by people in the city where I live. Again we spent nice two hours in conversation despite the fact Fred had a stroke just three weeks before my arrival.

Next day friends took me to Cambridge where I met Hugh Collins. He didn't reply to my letter in March but was willing to meet me. He showed me some brilliant memorabilia and drawings from the Sagan days and even gave me original lagergeld. I couldn't believe my luck.

Next on my list was Ota Centy, my countryman, who also escaped from communist lager in 50s – surely his Kriege experience had brought fruitful results. My third visit that day was to Don Gray, who shares another of my passions – speedway. He told me how he had come out of his Lanc. Head first with his chute tied round his ankles.

Next day I was on my way to Wisbech. I visited David Denchfield in March. What a museum he has! Not only debris from his crashed Spitfire but also many war mementoes and I could also admire his brilliant paintings. Next day was reserved for my Lincoln friend, Jim Taylor. He and his son drove all the way to Wisbech to pick me up, entertain me the whole afternoon and deliver me back in the evening. What a lovely day I had with them. Before moving on to Peterborough next day I had breakfast with Tony Johnson, who drove from Market Harborough to see me. He knows well Czech kriege Nicky Skavarda. We also compared notes on the difficulties of editing our books.

Following week I got to Droitwich the "short way" – via Hastings, Exeter and Isle of Wight. Here I met Bromsgrove-based Peter Hughes who, with his lovely wife, was kind enough to drive me to Ludlow where I met my hero, Jimmy James from Great Escape. For someone who read about Great Escape during his childhood and after 25 years met face to face one of its heroes it was like a miracle. Mr James was real gentleman and he took us to a local pub for a meal and we had great time. Peter Hughes took me back to Droitwich and I couldn't sleep from the day's excitement.

Next day off to Swindon where Cal Younger came over from his place and we chatted for two hours in nice summer weather. He told me many things about the Association and about Vic Gammon and Dixie Deans.

Next day I was driven from Swindon to Windsor, where Bill North was waiting for me with his son. From Windsor by bus to Victoria Coach Station where I am awaited by Fred Monaghan, another ex-POW, who is not a member of the Association. He helped me to bide the time until my coach back home arrived.

So in total I have met fourteen kriegies, which was more than I dared think. They all were wonderful hosts, very friendly gentlemen, and I would like to take this chance to thank them for their time, effort, gifts and kindness they gave me. I will never forget it.

BLUE JOB-BROWN JOB IN DEMAND

David Codd's splendid book, reviewed in the last issue of *The Kriegie*, has been so successful that two further editions have been published. A few copies are still available and anyone wanting one should telephone David on 01793 812664. The book costs £6.95 and postage is an additional £1.

Bad Landing for *Night Flight*

Members may have watched the BBC production *Night Flight* on 27 January last. These days the media don't seem to be making much of a job with their programmes about the air war in which we all took part. Sometimes there is bias, with Bomber Harris and his aircrews taking unjust flak, on other occasions the problem is incompetence, lack of research and, as John Whiteley put it in a letter to the BBC following the programme, "unreal episodes and glaring mistakes". He pointed out a number of them and described the programme as a "disjointed and sentimental sham which failed miserably in its presentation". John pointed out that no mention had been made of the awful casualties suffered by Bomber Command. The whole thing, he said, was an affront to surviving aircrew veterans.

Mr Colin Kearney, BBC Information, replied more in sorrow than in anger. The production team "went to great efforts to ensure that *Night Flight* was a realistic and thoughtful drama. Veterans of Bomber Command were extensively consulted... Mr Kearney pointed out that this was "first and foremost a drama and creative and dramatic interests are not always best served by meticulous attention to detail."

Some artistic licence is allowed, of course, and no doubt it irritates some of us. But however creative a programme, surely there should be meticulous attention to detail.

The letter alluded to other BBC programmes "that have recognised and investigated the historical facts of the human cost, and achievement, involved with the operations of Bomber and Fighter command (sic)." Nevertheless, Mr Kearney accepted that John held a different view and had recorded his comments for the programme makers. It was a polite letter.

Final answer:

At a séance a former bomber pilot asked the medium whether there is flying in Heaven. The good news is that "yes, there is", she told him. "The bad news is that you are to lead the next flight up".

The Road Show

In last year's issue of *The Kriegie* I reviewed Robin Neillands's book, *The Bomber War*, which, incidentally, is now available in paperback. When the book was launched, the publishers requested the author to give a talk. Robin suggested that, additionally, a panel of veterans who could take questions might be a good idea. The formula proved to be successful and another "performance" was given, again with much acclaim, at the Imperial War Museum. Since then the Roadshow has appeared at a number of venues, including the British Library and The RAF Museum (organised by the magazine *Aeroplane*). John Banfield and your editor have been members of the team at different times.

The aim of the show, apart from promoting *Bomber War*, is that of the book – to counter the claims by certain historians and TV documentary makers that Sir Arthur Harris and his aircrews were war criminals and, in particular, that Dresden was unnecessary, irresponsible and barbaric. Robin Neillands puts paid to the many myths which have emerged over the years. The problem is that to date we have preached to the converted. Audiences are keenly interested, receptive, often well-informed and very friendly. If there have been no hostile questions, the Roadshow has reached young people uncertain of what to believe and perhaps inoculated them against distortion and lies.

Members March in Golden Jubilee Parade

Participation by ex-servicemen in the Queen's Golden Jubilee Parade was organised by the Confederation of British Service and Ex-Service Organisations (COBSEO) of which your Association is a member. We could not fill the ten places we had been offered for the march but we were represented by our President and Chairman, Air Commodore Charles Clarke, Vice Chairman, Wing Commander Dave Bernard, Committee members, Peter Skinner who carried our standard all the way, Squadron Leader Bob Ankerson and Cal Younger. They were joined by David Owen, who has been a fine representative of the Association on many occasions.

It was a very strenuous outing. Participants were requested to arrive at Tothill Street by 1300 hours, to form up by 1430 hours and to march into Horseguards Road at 1500 hours. The parade was timed to enter the Mall at 1546 hours. Needless to say, it did not quite work out that way. The COBSEO marchers were at the end of the colourful procession and saw nothing of it. Evidently the floats, the dancers and the rest took longer than expected and the services parade was held up for quite some time. The long wait and short bursts of marching, with intervals between, were hard going. Fortunately, Charles Clarke persuaded commissioners at the Home Office to allow us in to sit for a while.

Any disgruntlement soon disappeared when the bands struck up as the parade turned in to the Mall. Those who march regularly on Remembrance Sunday are accustomed to crowds and applause but they have experienced nothing like this. From a million throats came a thrilling roar like a solid bank of sound, yet the marching music somehow rose above it and kept weary legs going. Thousands of children waved vigorous flags and cheered shrilly. The Queen, wearing gold, took the salute at the Queen Victoria memorial outside Buckingham Palace.

That was a memorable moment. The rest was anticlimax as the march became a matter of keeping going to the end. The Kriegie group fell into the nearest pub then, much refreshed, waited for the thrilling flypast, not by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, for they do not belong in the fifty years of the Queen's reign, but by aircraft of the present day RAF.

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR BILL REID VC

Bill Reid belonged to a number of ex-service organisations, including our own, and he was a very popular man. So it was no surprise that St Clements Danes was full for his Memorial Service on 7 May 2002. It was a moving service, arranged by the Bomber Command Association whose Chairman, Squadron Leader Tony Iveson, gave the address. It seemed that most of the congregation, including Sir Peter Squire, Chief of the Air Staff, accepted the invitation to a reception at the RAF Club after the service. There was scarcely room to move in the ballroom. Many of our members were present and had the honour of meeting his widow, Violet.

Bill, the last of Bomber Command VCs, died on 28 November 2001. He was awarded the VC for his heroism on the night of 3 November 1943. Piloting a 61 Squadron Lancaster, he pressed on to the target, Dusseldorf, after a nightfighter attack which left him with serious injuries and a severely damaged aircraft. A second attack killed his navigator, mortally wounded his wireless operator and added to his own injuries. Yet he continued to the target and bombed successfully. Aided by his flight engineer, somehow he managed to get the aircraft home and made a crash landing. Later he joined 617 Squadron and was brought down by a "friendly" bomb from above. He ended the war in Luckenwalde.

Bill Reid's postwar career was in agriculture including nine years as agricultural adviser to the MacRobert Trusts and a director of MacRobert Farms (Downside) Ltd. Fittingly, he was a mourner at the funeral of Lady MacRobert "the fairy Godmother of the RAF", donor of MacRobert's Reply.

STALAG LUFT 3 - TUNNEL MARTYRS PAINTING

CAN YOU HELP?

Myron Williams, President of the Calgary Branch of the RCAF Prisoner of War Association, is trying to locate the next of kin of two of the fifty murdered by the Gestapo following the Great Escape. They are **Michael James O'Brien Casey**, whose wartime address was 66 Greyhound Hill, Hendon, and **Robert Stewart** whose address was 14, The Ridgeway, Golders Green.

Fifty prints of the Tunnel Martyrs painting, which has pictures of The Fifty around the border, have been set aside to be given to next of kin. If any member knows someone who may be related to either of those men or has any information that might be helpful, please let John Banfield know. He will pass on any gen to Myron.

More to Come

We ran out of space for this issue of *The Kriegie* but we hope to get the next issue on the drawing board early next year. Among other items, we have an interesting piece by Alf Jenner about his return to Stalag Luft I. (Editor)

60th ANNIVERSARY OF COMET ESCAPE LINE (BELGIUM)

Paddy Hope reports:

The anniversary celebration, in Brussels' was spread over three days, from 19 - 21 October 2001. It began with an evening reception on Friday, 19 October at the home of M. and Mme Holvoet-Legrelles, former members of the Comet Line. It was attended by members, helpers, escapers and evaders. Unfortunately, Countess Andree de Jongh GM, founder of the Line, was not well enough to attend. Now aged 84, she is confined to a wheelchair. Our British weather was responsible for the cancellation of our flight from Bradford and we, too, missed the reception.

The next morning, Saturday, was dry and bright and we were able to enjoy the splendid Grand Place in Brussels, just minutes from our hotel. I made a long planned visit to the grave of a brave Frenchman, Maurice Leroux, whose family sheltered me in Brussels over Christmas 1942. I stayed with them until 9 January 1943, having a wonderful Christmas holiday, even attending a football match.

On Saturday afternoon, we were all collected by a Belgian Air Force coach and taken to the air base at Beauvechain, about thirty miles from Brussels, and entertained in the Officers' Mess. There were speeches and presentations and a male quintet sang many old favourites of the war years. It was most enjoyable. There was also a large display of photographs and memorabilia from the Comet archives, which featured many heroes and heroines of the Comet Line.

We rose early on Sunday morning to attend Mass and a memorial service at the Basilica at Koekelberg. This was a splendid affair; a large congregation was honoured by the presence of Queen Fabiola of Belgium, the British ambassador, air attaches and senior clergy. Before the service the Queen attended a private meeting with members of the Line. On this occasion Countess de Jongh was present. The Queen spent some time with her, then was introduced to individual members of our group. I was honoured to be presented to Her Majesty.

At the end of the Mass the Standards of the various associations were presented at the Comet Memorial Window in the Basilica. Wreaths were laid, the Last Post sounded and the national anthems of Great Britain, USA and Belgium were played. It was a most impressive ceremony.

The Queen then left and we all returned to the Europa Hotel for a memorable dinner. There was a sumptuous dinner and we were entertained by several impressive speeches, notably one in impeccable French by Sir Lewis Hodges, former President of the RAF Escaping Society, and by Mme Andree Dumont OBE, organiser of the Comet Line reunions for many years. Gifts were exchanged and then we said a sad farewell to the heroes and heroines of the Comet Line who had welcomed us so often. This was to be the last reunion. Our flight left for Bradford on time and we arrived home, tired but exhilarated after a memorable and uplifting reunion.

Among British members present were Jack Newton, first of Comet Line's many escapers, Ray Worrall, Bryan Morgan, George Duffee, Elizabeth Harrison, Frank Dell, Roy Brown from Canada and many others who returned with the help of the Comet Line "to fight another day".

A CONDUCTOR'S JOURNEY

By Major James (Jimmy) Howe MBE

Self-published at £9.99

Urged by friends, Jimmy Howe, a modest man, has written and published an unpretentious and fascinating story of his career in music. From playing the cornet in a colliery brass band when he was a mere child, Jimmy went on to conduct leading national orchestras at the Royal Albert Hall and elsewhere.

Born on 11 November 1917, he might have become a miner like his father, but when he was nine his mother arranged piano lessons for him and later he joined the Shiny Row Silver Prize Band of which his father was bandmaster. Jimmy draws a vivid picture of a mining community in the 1920s. At this point I can do no better than quote the succinct account of Jimmy's career that appears on the back cover of the book:

"Joining the Royal Scots as a band boy in 1933 (aged 15), he describes army discipline and the pre-war pleasure of making music around the seaside resorts which was disrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Serving in France and Belgium as a stretcher bearer, he was taken prisoner by men of the German SS Totenkopf Division at the village of Le Paradis, and he vividly recalls his experience of the battle. His time in the prison camp was not wasted. With musical instruments bartered from German guards, exchanged from Polish prisoners and some provided through British Red Cross channels, he formed a dance band which helped maintain the morale of British captives in Poland and Berlin. After the war, he was appointed Bandmaster of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, commissioned in 1959 into the Scots Guards as Lieutenant Director of Music.

Preparations and the work that goes on behind the scenes of ceremonial occasions such as Trooping the Colour, the annual Armistice Parade at the Cenotaph, and providing the orchestral music at Buckingham Palace are recounted with a sense of humour. Retiring from the army in 1974 after 41 years service, his musical career took on another aspect. Conductor with the BBC, appearances with leading symphony orchestras at the Royal Albert Hall, then as an entrepreneur presenting massed band concerts at major venues throughout the country.

His anecdotes and descriptions of unusual events experienced as an adjudicator at Brass Band Festivals and while conducting orchestral rehearsals show that there is a light as well as a serious side to making music. He now lives in Eastbourne where he plays the cornet in local musical ensembles and conducts bands on the town's famous band stand during the summer."

Jimmy Howe spent three years as a kriegie, mostly at Stalag VIIIIB, but also at Stalag IIID near Berlin - which turned out to be a propaganda camp. As a non-combatant, he was repatriated in 1943. Those years as a kriegie were very important to him and many will remember his Reunion Concerts at Croydon in aid of service charities, including ours. Our own impresario, Vic Gammon, gained much of his expertise from Jimmy Howe and worked with him. Jimmy was made an honorary member of the Association which, this book makes clear, he regarded as a signal honour. My most vivid memory of Jimmy is when he played the last post at Vic's funeral.

I read the book non-stop from London to Melbourne and regretted that there was not more of it.

A Conductor's Journey is available from the author at a cost of £11.74 including packing and postage. The address is: 34 Pashley Road, Eastbourne, BN20 8DY

ESCAPE TO FREEDOM

An Airman's tale of Capture, Escape & Evasion

By Tony Johnson (Leo Cooper L19.95)

Tony Johnson is lucky to have a publisher as well known as Leo Cooper. *Escape to Freedom* has been given a handsome production with good quality photographs complementing clear text. At a time when there is a spate of reminiscences flowing from nostalgic pens it is only occasionally that a book with star quality turns up. The author's experiences differ little from those of many other kriegies' memoirs but he recounts them with a nice sense of humour. Tony describes his training, his creeping up and life on 427 (Canadian) Squadron. His characterisation is particularly good. One doesn't need photographs to picture the members of his crew. Their first op, in a Wimpy, was on Duisberg and the author conveys the fears of the sprog, as well as the awesome sights below and around him, in very lively prose.

On 16 April 1943 Tony's crew set out to bomb the IG Farben plant at Ludwigshafen. They were convinced that they were decoys for the main force, which went on to Pilsen. Crippled by flak, the Wimpy went into a screaming dive from which the skipper extricated it. He managed to control the aircraft long enough to allow the crew to bale out, but perished himself. Tony made a valiant effort to get away but was soon caught and found himself in a canvas-covered lorry with the body of his skipper.

The author describes his experience at Dulag Luft from which he was sent to Stalag Luft I at Barth. Life there was much the same for Tony as for the rest of us, wherever we were, but it is always interesting to read how other people settled into kriegie life. In October 1943 Tony moved to K Lager at Heydekrug. His narrative has occasional errors, especially when he writes about activities in the adjoining A Lager.

These are unimportant but he takes artistic licence a little too far when he claims that Grimson's remarkable escape over the wire from Sagan in July took place at Barth in October.

The real strength of the book lies in its marvellously evocative account of the dreadful voyage of K Lager kriegies on the Interberg in July 1944, the subsequent "Run up the road", the forced march in February to Fallingb., the author's brave escape from the column in dreadful winter conditions and his eventual escape from the column when the final march took place in April. His adventures on the run make exciting reading. Reached England on 17 April and was reunited with the girl who had waited for him and now became his wife. Their romance adds piquancy to the story. Tony went on to spend 28 years in the Essex Constabulary retiring as a Detective Superintendent.

A founder member of the Regional Crime Squad, he led an exciting life. Perhaps his next book will cover that period of his life. His present book suggests that it would make a fascinating read.

C.Y.

PAUL HILTON CGM

Paul Hilton, who died aged 80 in October, was a very modest man. Few people knew that he had been awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal – a rare decoration. Flying a 35 Squadron Halifax, Paul was attacked first by flak and then by three nightfighters on the Essen raid of 2-3 June 1942. With three engines gone, one on fire and the aircraft badly damaged, Paul gave the order to bale out. Four of the all-NCO crew did so but the flight engineer's parachute was unusable. Paul gave him his and held the aircraft long enough for him to jump. Paul then attempted the impossible – to crash-land his Halifax over unknown terrain at night. He thought he could see a river below and decided to attempt a landing on it, but it was not a river but a village in Belgium. He got the Halifax down somehow, but hit a house and lost one wing. He managed to prise open the hatch and climbed out. His only injury was a scratch on the nose. A German soldier appeared immediately. The Halifax was burning and Paul could not convince the man that it was going to blow up any minute. More people arrived and they quickly saw the danger. Paul and the soldier backed off just as the fuel tanks exploded. Paul and the rest of his crew were kriegies for the remainder of the war.

THE LAST ESCAPE

The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners

Of War in Germany 1944 – 45

By John Nichol & Tony Rennel

Penguin/Viking £20

Deservedly Radio 4's **Book of the Week**, this must be regarded as the definitive account of Prisoners of War in the last days of Nazi Germany. Deeply researched and full of information of which few of us had any idea, **The Last Escape** is one of those rare books – a work of scholarship which reads like a thriller. Page-turning is compulsive. The writing of the two authors blends so that you don't know which is writing what, though you can guess.

Dozens of ex-kriegies have been interviewed, letters and diaries scrutinised, Imperial War Museum tapes listened to and official documents researched. The authors have drawn on many personal accounts by, among others, Vic Gammon, John Dominy (Ron Moggi), Richard Passmore (Roger Peacock), Percy Caruthers, Robert Kee and Phil Potts, as well as numerous biographical and historical works. Most of the text, however, is taken from primary sources.

MOONLESS NIGHT

By B.A. 'Jimmy' James

Leo Cooper - Pen & Sword £19.95

Moonless Night was first published in 1983 by William Kimber and again in 1995 by Sentinel Publishing. Leo Cooper has now produced a splendid new edition and no one deserves it more than Jimmy James. I reviewed the book in 1983 and 1995 so I will not do so again.

Briefly, Jimmy, a regular officer, was shot down in a 9 Squadron Wellington on the night of 5/6 June 1940.

Paul's post-war story was sheer magic. He joined de Havilland Aircraft as an apprentice and became a stress engineer. Among other aircraft he worked on the wings of the Comet. Later he established his own company with headquarters in a chicken shed. He lived in a caravan near Radlett. His aim was to build laboratory equipment for teaching purposes. He designed and built a subsonic ram jet engine and tested it and other engines of his own design using a Land Rover at night on the Watford By-pass. He moved first to Eastleigh and then, as his business expanded, to Horsebridge Mill at King Somborne. He invented laboratory equipment for the engineering departments of universities all over the world. In an early *Kriegie* we published a picture of Paul with one of the model jet engines, built to scale and perfect in every detail, he made for training on jet engines. In 1993 he received an honorary doctorate from Brighton University in recognition of his work for engineering training.

Paul was born in Malaya and educated in England. His mother died in Japanese hands in Sumatra, after being moved from camp to camp. His father was imprisoned in Changi. Gillian, whom he married in 1968, wishes to join the Association's growing list of widows who wish to continue their involvement with us.

The book is beautifully put together, with descriptions of the various forced marches interspersed with astonishing chronicles of what went on with regard to kriegies in the corridors of power of all the warring countries. Was massacre likely? Should paratroops be sent in to the camps? The German discussions on the subject make interesting reading.

Because John Nichol was a PoW himself, though in very difficult circumstances, and because he has mixed with members of the Association, he has an understanding usually lacking in historians. He and Tony Rennel vividly convey the chaos of those last months, the columns marching hither and yon through terrible winter conditions, the advancing armies, the refugees, the elation and the despair. The emotions of the kriegies as we waited to learn our fate are matched with the words of politicians who were deciding it. The jacket depicts marchers in the snow. One is pulling his small sledge and the book gives cogent reasons why we have chosen this as best symbolising our *Kriegie* years for our memorial sculpture. The publishers have produced a handsome volume. I cannot recommend this book too highly.

CY

He was an inveterate escaper and, following his capture in the Great Escape, was sent with Wings Day and one or two other survivors to Sachsenhausen Concentration camp, from which the group also escaped.

He is still involved with Sachsenhausen, being the British representative on the Sachsenhausen International Committee.

In my view, **Moonless Night** is the best account of PoW experiences so far written. It is unlikely to be surpassed now. Not only is it exciting and inspiring, it is beautifully written, often with a touch of poetry – a work to treasure.

CY

WISHING ALL OUR READERS A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR