This story was submitted to the People's War site by Roger Marsh of the 'Action Desk — Sheffield' Team on behalf of Edward L. Humes, and has been added to the site with the authors permission. The author fully understands the site's terms and conditions.

Introduction:

"Just Another Story" was written, at the suggestion of Yvonne Agnes Kennedy, who felt that my experiences, whilst serving with the R.A.F. would make interesting reading to those who knew me.

My thanks go to Clive Hill, the nephew of my flight engineer, who spent many hours researching the loss of Lancaster II LL639 and who kindly gave permission to use the photographs and sketch maps included in my story.

E.L. Humes.

Chapter 1: Early Days

Early in May 1939 I was struggling to decide whether to embark on a career in the R.A.F. or to set out on training for the teaching profession. My parents were not happy with the first and many and sometimes heated were the discussions we had over the subject. Finally they agreed to my wishes and I visited a recruiting office to discuss the matter with officials of the Force.

It appeared that I was not sufficiently qualified for duties as a member of Air Crew, but was advised to enlist and try again when I was a member of the Service. In hindsight I am not sure that this was good advice, nevertheless, I enrolled as a flight mechanic. This might just satisfy my desire to be working with aircraft.

After completing my recruit training I was ready to begin my course, but I was to be disappointed. The declaration of War was imminent and all sorts of changes were being made in the R.A.F., along with many others. I was posted not to an airfield for training in my chosen trade, but to an airfield without any planes.

Protest as I may, I was informed that, "You are in the Air Force now," a phrase I was to hear many times over the next seven years. Nothing for it but to get on with it and become an efficient balloon operator. The training was not too hard, either physically or mentally, and I enjoyed the course but the worst was yet to come.

War was declared. The good life came to an end and I found myself posted to the Essex County Cricket Ground to join a small group to operate a barrage balloon.

What a disappointment! Ten of us housed in a Tennis Pavilion with only minimum facilities, how was I to know that this was going to stand me in very good stead in the years ahead?

Occasionally, I got a break for I was selected to represent my squadron at football, and it was after a match that I met an officer who again whetted my appetite for aircrew. There was a way. I must apply to re-muster. There was no hesitation on my part and I was granted an interview to attain my suitability for the new venture. It was now obvious to those in command that I was far from happy with my present role. To my horror I was moved to serve on a drifter in the estuary of the River Thames. Six airmen and six ex fishermen living in the most deplorable conditions I had yet encountered. We were anchored in position and at the mercy of the changing tides. Besides this

we were often attacked by marauding fighters of the Luftwaffe, that often got to us before we could raise the balloon to its operational height. Wanting the chance to retaliate, I dared to ask when I might receive my posting to air crew training. Surprise, surprise, I was sent to Cardington to take a course on DRIVING. One good thing was that it was Heaven after the rigours of the previous months. The course was so very interesting that for a while I forgot aircrew training. Another plus was that I was now with people of my own age group, more or less. All good things come to an end. At the end of the course I was posted to a small hut in the East End of London- Blitz and all. This was to be my home until I got my wish.

Stories of the Blitz are legion, so I will not bore you with mine.

SUCCESS AT LAST!

Great news! Report to St. John's Wood, London to commence Air Crew Training.

I could not get there quickly enough. Soon I was having tests for suitability in many fields. The majority of my colleagues were of my own age group once again, and although I was classed a raw recruit, I did not mind one little bit. "Square Bashing" was no problem to me as I had done it all before. Discipline was not hard for me as I had already had almost two years of life in the R.A.F. medical checks, attitude tests and many other tests were carried out and finally, I was on my way to St. Andrew's in Scotland for Initial Training.

Life was so exciting! Studying the mysteries of basic navigation, Morse Code, meteorology and lots of other subjects in the hallowed cloisters of St. Andrew's and in my leisure time, becoming familiar with my fellow trainees made the time pass very, very quickly. Even the weather was glorious!

The time came to show how well I had studied. Exam followed exam. Would it never end? At last came the news I had waited for. I was over the first hurdle. Where to now? Across the River Tay was a small airfield which had been taken over by the R.A.F. This was my next destination. The accommodation was superb, but what was more exciting was that there were aircraft. Real aeroplanes. Only Tiger Moths, but for the coming weeks, I would be having lessons on how to fly. The weather was not always kind at Scone, but I was eventually allowed to fly solo. Such a Wonderful experience, but sadly, I now had to move on to the next part of my course. I had a couple of weeks leave, which enabled me to tell my parents and others just how much I was enjoying myself.

Heaton Park, Manchester was to be my next place of rest. Rumour had it that the stay here would be for a couple of weeks, and then there would be an overseas posting to further training. This was not to be. The Air Ministry had decreed that as there was a glut of people wishing to train as Pilots, there must be some change to provide crew for the other positions in Bomber aircraft. Lowly airmen that we were, there was no way that we could work out how the selection was made. A group of pilots who had already flown against the Luftwaffe, were reclassified as navigators and bomb aimers under training. Needless to say, this was not at all satisfactory, and the last we saw of them was their leaving camp for the Belgian Embassy!!!

What of our small group? Nineteen were to train as navigators, and one as a pilot. Within two weeks the u/t pilot was on his way somewhere overseas. The rest of us spent our days doing very little other than attending morning parade and enjoying the rest of the day, doing whatever we thought best. After twelve weeks, this routine became extremely boring.

Manchester was no longer an attraction as the weather was wet and cold, not to mention the fact that our Nissen hut was very damp and very cold, and we should really be abroad to continue our training.

As the senior airman, I was delegated to meet the station adjutant to ascertain when we would be posted. He was as surprised as I was. Officially we were not on the station! "Go home for two weeks (or more) and you will be advised of your next posting." During the third week I was told to report at Bridgenorth in Shropshire to begin the next phase of navigational training.

On arrival, I found that once again I was on a unit without aircraft. Never mind, my colleagues from Heaton Park were also there. I was not going overseas.

Discipline and hard study were now the order of the day. Advanced studies in the art of navigation and all subjects connected therewith. Little time to spare. Even Christmas was a mere day from studies. Examination time again. Results were published and I heaved a sigh of relief, when I found that I was considered suitable to continue with the course. As the next stage was to put all that I had learned into practice, then there must be aircraft at the next stopping place.

Flying at Last

Advanced Navigation School, Dumfries. This was to be the nearest I was to get to a posting overseas. Yes, there were aircraft on the station. Several Anson and one Botha aircraft were used as flying classrooms. The time had come to put into practice all that I had been taught. Basic ground training continued but now we had to use our knowledge to follow a route and return to Base, quite often with a pilot whose knowledge of English was sketchy, and who was apt to turn off course to see some beauty spot he had heard of in his schooldays in Poland or France, or some other European country. Two trainee navigators were allocated to each trip, one to plot the outward journey and the other to plot the course for Base. Although mistakes were made, it gave each a great sense of achievement to complete the trip without having recourse to the pilot, asking for a positional check to obtain a new starting point.

Aerial Photography was very difficult for me. I was small and to me the camera was HUGE. To hold it pointing out of a window was almost a physical impossibility, especially when the pilot banked to look at the ground below. I often thought of what might happen to me back in Dumfries if I should ever loose the camera out of the window at three or four thousand feet. Despite the hazards I got results which satisfied the instructor, and was ready to commence night flying. What is more, I had struck up a good understanding with my fellow pupil, which I hoped would stand us both in good stead during the coming weeks of night work.

This was not to be. By now I should have known the ways of the R.A.F. better. A new intake of "trainees" arrived on the station. They had completed their course abroad and were sporting the coveted Brevets. The partly trained rookies were paired off with newly qualified navigators for night

flying. The new boys had never flown over a completely darkened country side and many were the arguments in and out of the aircraft. It was no joke to take over navigation from a person who had got himself hopelessly lost. By this time, we "home trained" navigators were proving pretty hot stuff at the task! Or so we thought. Training seemed to take an eternity and I was relieved when final exams took place. How would I do this time?

I passed but was not present at the presentation of our Brevets - I had been injured in an inter flight football match and was to spend the next three weeks in the station Sick Bay. Still I was now a navigator and proud to wear the insignia and the three stripes which I received.

642170 Sgt. Humes E.L. (Navigator)

Celebrations went on for many hours, both at Dumfries and in Carlisle, which was not too far away. Home again to enjoy what I thought was a well-earned leave. Stay there until you receive your next posting. I hoped that the Heaton Park episode would not be repeated.

It wasn't. After three weeks I was to report to O.T.U. Chipping Warden where I would join a group of newly qualified pilots, bomb aimers, wireless ops. and gunners to form an aircrew.

One Step Nearer to Operational Flying

Chipping Warden, was an R.A.F. operational flying training unit. The aircraft used were Wellingtons and the training staff were almost 100% ex-operational aircrew. The atmosphere was so exhilarating!

For a week or so, we had lectures etc., and we mingled with the trainees in other flying categories. There were pilots, navigators, bomb-aimers, wireless- operators and air-Gunners from almost every country in the British Empire. The time arrived when I was approached by an Australian Pilot and asked if I would like to join him in forming an aircrew. I had noticed Noel at a discussion group a few days earlier, and had been impressed by his attitude, of course I would join him.

Our next task was to find a Bomb-Aimer suitable to us both. Jack Moulsdale (RAAF) had started his flying training in Australia at the same time as Noel, but had not qualified as a pilot. Undaunted, he continued his training and became a bomb - aimer. It seemed to me that it would be a wise decision to have someone else who had experience of flying an aircraft in our crew. Now to find a W./Op.- how the title drops from the tongue - now I was aircrew. It was left to yours truly to make the choice; even up the score; find a Brit. All agreed that the well built Scot would fit the bill. Jock Hughes became the fourth member of our crew. In order to complete our Wellington crew, we needed an Air-Gunner. The four of us looked around carefully and decided that the tall, quiet Australian was the best bet. He agreed to join us.

Now we were a crew. From now onwards we had to work hard to become a unit, not just airmen wearing brevets, but a group who must learn to trust and depend on one another. Various ground exercises were carried out until we each knew what was expected, should we ever become involved in any problem, major or minor.

Flying training began in earnest. Cross country flights in which I had to prove myself as an able navigator. Practice bombing and infra-red photography, where Jack had to show his prowess at hitting the target. Jock had to impress us with his ability to send and receive radio messages and

to obtain navigational data, which would assist in locating the position of the aircraft. During these flights, Reg would operate his rear turret and become used to life in a small rear-turret. There were, of course, times when we "flew for real". Fighter simulation and long night flights of four hours or more to prepare for the tasks ahead.
On one occasion we were instructed to join eight other aircraft in a six hour night cross country exercise, which would involve every aspect of what we would be likely to meet on an operational flight, without the "flak". Things became complicated when a blanket of cloud covered the whole of the British Isles. Radio silence was essential and navigation was carried out using the courses worked out at the morning briefing. I cannot say that I enjoyed the first couple of hours! Suddenly I had the opportunity to practice the astro navigation I had enjoyed so much. One shot only. Could I rely on it? I had no option. A slight alteration of course was needed. We continued on our way, all praying that my fix had been correct. Infra-red photographs were taken by Jack on pre- flight time schedule. Eventually we crossed our fingers, by my reckoning we were within a few miles of Base. Imagine our relief when we received a message giving a course to fly to complete the trip. We were only a few minutes away.
On landing, we discovered that six of the eight aircraft which had left with us, had landed in various parts of the country, one had crash landed in Ireland. As far as my crew were concerned they had found a useful navigator.

Chapter 2: 1678 Conversion Unit

Two weeks leave and then report to Little Snoring. What a peculiar name. What a wonderful surprise. Sitting on the aerodrome were four engined aircraft, not the usual Lancaster but a type with Radial engines. This was to be our operational aircraft. All we had to do now was to show that we were capable of flying as a crew.
First we needed extra hands. Clive Banfield became the flight engineer and Clem Hem was our mid- upper gunner. Clive was English and Clem Australian. Four Australians and three Englishmen. The youngest was twenty one, and the eldest, thirty six (this was not quite the case as I discovered many, many years later, that Clive had falsified his age in order to leave a reserved occupation to fly.)
Very quickly we gelled into a crew again. "Thack" was the first to experience the thrill of flying in the Lanc II. He sang its praises and we were not disappointed when we had our first flight. Once again we had to carry out the drills of cross- country flying, Fighter affiliation, night- flying and the like but there was an additional item- Low flying! Here was a new slant on navigation. Map reading was not easy at the speed we flew in the new aircraft. Gradually everything slotted into place. We soon understood why Clive had been added to the team as the multiplicity of controls was more than one pair of hands could cope with. This quiet, confident man was just what we needed.
Our training schedule was moving along nicely, but halted when early mist and fog made flying impossible. The Nissen huts in which we were billeted were cold and damp, and so miserable to spend the days in. I was reminded of the old days in Balloon Command. The ground courses had

been completed and we longed to be told of our posting to an operational unit, but we now had to train in using a new navigational device- Gee H. This was a new method of using radar to reach the target and to release the bomb load when visual signals coincided on a screen on the nav. table. This was not a very thrilling exercise for the other crewmembers, and we were all very pleased when I became proficient and the monotonous training flights were completed.
Now came the news we had waited so long to hear. We were to join 115 Squadron for Operational duty! Whilst we were on leave we received orders to return to Foulsham, not to join 115 but to become the nucleus of a newly formed Squadron-514. Our base was to be at Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire. We were allocated an aircraft and transferred all our personal equipment in it to our new home. Some crews had to carry out a raid on Germany on their way to Waterbeach. Luckily no aircraft were lost.
I cannot describe my feelings on stepping out into the atmosphere of the new unit. Noise and bustle everywhere. The station had been completed shortly before war was declared. Our quarters were to be in red brick barracks and there was hardly a Nissen Hut in sight. Hot and cold water - such luxury!
Again "Thack" was to be the first to fly an operational mission. He was second pilot to a more experienced man before being allowed to captain his own crew on bombing missions. All flying was now in earnest. More Gee-H. Dinghy drills, escape drills, low level flying and all the exercises we had carried out so many times before. It was somewhat nerve racking, waiting to hear the word that we were to be on Ops at last.
The order of battle showed that we were to fly "for real" on 25th November 1943.
'Power and Majesty'
Posing for company photographs provides the rare opportunity for an Armstrong Whitworth test pilot to put on 60° of bank and show what a Lanc. II can do, Delivered to No. 408 (Goose) Squadron RCAF at Linton - on - Ouse, this machine (DS 778) was, like so many, destined for an early demise, failing to return from Kassel on 22/23 October 1943, barely two months from the day this picture was taken.
Photo: Hawker Siddeley / AWA. Ref: 'The Lancaster at War 2, Garbett & Goulding. Pub- Ian Allan
Life on Squadron.
Little changed; now we were an aircrew and believed that we were equal to any flying task allotted to us. Air tests had to be carried out and also the various drills which would keep us up to operational standard. Each morning, we looked at Flying Orders hoping that we would be listed for "ops." registering varying emotions. The more often we carried out a raid over enemy territory, the quicker we could complete our tour. None of us had any thought that we would not complete our thirty operations.
There was a lot of banter and, more often than not, it would include arguments between the many members of the Commonwealth who made up the squadron. Who provided the best crews? Why was it so cold and wet in England? Football matches, cross country runs and other sporting events, which pitted Aussie against Pommie, Scot against Welshman, and West Indian against

New Zealander. Of course not all free time was spent on camp for the city of Cambridge was not very far away and transport was frequent. The city was a place of recreation for other Forces, both air and ground. Many were the disputes between members of the American aircrews as to who did the best job and these arguments did not always end peacefully. Fortunately I was a "pacifist," so kept well out of the way when the discussions became heated.

I was so pleased to be selected for the Squadron Football X1. Each Saturday and quite often on weekdays we played matches against local teams, Cambridge University included. I cannot remember having to withdraw because of operational duties.

Numerous stories written about life in Bomber Command tell of boisterous nights in the Officers' or Sergeants' Mess but I have no recollection of such events in the Mess at 514.

Ground crews and operational personnel built up a great rapport. Each aircraft was meticulously cared for and on many occasions, ground crews waited for the return of "their" aircraft. Should an aircraft fail to return, there was great distress but soon those responsible for maintenance would transfer their allegiance to the replacement aircrew.

Christmas Day was an occasion when senior ranks showed their appreciation for the work done by ground staff by serving the midday meal. The Australian members had saved a good portion of their parcels from home to pass on as thanks to our own ground crew. Fruitcake, chocolate bars, tinned fruit and all manner of goods which were hard, almost impossible to obtain in England, were eagerly accepted.

Life returned to normal the following day. Christmas 1943 was very cold indeed and all personnel not engaged in other duties were ordered to assist in removing snow from the runways. Surely ops. would not take place that night. After all the hard work, the "Stand Down " was given. Normal flying was resumed on 26th December.

Throughout December 1943, January, February and March 1944, the crew continued operational flying. March 30th was the most terrifying night when the city of Nuremberg was the target. Something was drastically wrong as aircraft were shot out of the sky. Over 100 being the victims of anti- aircraft fire and the relentless attacks by enemy fighters. More allied planes were lost on the way back to bases in England.

Thackray's crew survived.

Triumphs and Disaster

Our first operational flight as a crew was to be to Biarritz. In company with ten aircraft from other squadrons in 3 Group, we were to drop mines in the harbour there.

Whilst Thack and the rest of the crew carried out flight tests, I worked on the route we were to follow, and how I worked. Nothing could be left to chance! The day passed so very quickly and soon we were sitting down to the pre-op meal. Now we were operational. Parachutes and Mae Wests, fitted we boarded the aircraft. We taxied to the runway and at last received the green. In a few minutes we were airborne. Soon we had reached the English coast and were heading south over France.

There was no sign of the other planes which were supposed to accompany us, but we flew on and on. As yet no enemy aircraft was sighted nor were we troubled by flak. Surely things couldn't be this easy. Biarritz! On time and on target. Where were the others? We circled for a few minutes and as there was still no sign of other planes, we decided to release our mines and turn on course for home. The return flight was no more exciting than the outward journey until we crossed the English coast, where we were immediately picked up by searchlights and directed to the West where we finally landed at Exeter, many miles from Waterbeach! Two things arose from the resultant enquiry. First, we should have received an "operation cancelled" signal before crossing the coast on the outward leg, and secondly we had been mistaken by the Observer Corps for a Wellington on a training flight that had got lost and broadcast a " May Day" signal. The searchlights had carried out the rescue procedure with us instead of them. We finished our first op. accompanied by an armed guard and of course had a tongue lashing from our various section heads. Apologies were forthcoming when the truth of the story finally came out.

Berlin was to be our next port of call. My nerves jangled for the whole of the day and I checked and re- checked every part of my pre flight plan. I settled as soon as we were airborne. This is the job I had been trained for during so many long months. What is more, I was responsible for the lives of six others, or so I told myself. Very few words were spoken during the flight. We were all on a knife-edge. Bomb aimer to Skipper, " Target directly ahead." Relief; little of note had occurred on the outward leg and obviously my route planning had been O.K. I did not wish to look at the burning city, I was quite happy to listen to the observations of the crew. We turned on the course for home and Thack let out a horrendous cry! An aircraft was turning immediately ahead. Surely we were not going to end the trip by crashing into a friendly aircraft. In seconds the danger was over but I needed to work out a slight adjustment to our course. From my position I could see nothing but listened to the comments of the others. I was scared, the aircraft shook and rolled but this was simply because we were flying in the stream of other planes. Searchlights groped around the night sky and I could see these. In next to no time Jack was able to report the sighting of the enemy coast and a short time afterwards, the marvellous news that we had crossed the English coast. Soon we were over Waterbeach, home, safe and sound. December 2nd 1943 was a date I shall never forget.

Debriefing over, we returned to barracks and turned in. Sleep would not come as I lay thinking of the events of the day. I was not alone for the other crewmembers were also reliving the events of the night of our very first operation over Germany.

Chapter 3: ABANDON AIRCRAFT!!!

The day was 11th April, the year 1944. Our target was to be a fairly easy trip to Aachen, perhaps our shortest flight over Germany. The usual preparations were made and in the early evening we set course for the target hoping to return well before midnight. All went well and we dropped the bomb load over the city and set course for home.

Disaster struck! The port outer engine caught fire. It seemed that we had been hit by flak, as none of the air gunners had sighted enemy aircraft. Noel ordered us to prepare to abandon which meant that all secret equipment and navigational and wireless codes had to be destroyed. Gunners had to leave their turrets and all had to head for the escape hatches, except of course for Thack. For a few moments we flew on. Clive was doing his utmost to extinguish the blaze and believed that we would be able to continue. The blazing engine fell away. The end was near, as the pilot could no longer keep control.
ABANDON AIRCRAFT!! Jack answered at once. Reg reported that his turret would not operate. Jock said that he would try to help Reg, and Clem responded that he too would move to help with the rear turret. Clive was not at all pleased that we were to abandon. As for myself, I headed for the front escape hatch passing both Clive and Thack, who was still at the controls. As I reached the top of the steps, I was astounded to find the escape hatch open, but Jack's parachute pack was still in the container. There was no sign of him!
I had no time for further thought, for at that moment the nose of the plane dropped and I found myself trapped by my legs. To this day I do not know what was preventing me from leaving the stricken aircraft. What was I to do? Without any further thought, I pulled the ripcord. I felt a sharp pain in my legs but to my great relief, my ‘chute pulled me clear of the aircraft. I drifted towards the earth, but could see nothing nor could I hear a sound. I prayed to almighty God for his help and cried out for my mother. All this had happened in seconds.

I assumed that I was drifting downwards but could not be sure where I was going to land. Crash! I had landed in undergrowth but where? I did not have the slightest idea. Minutes passed, I could feel that my uniform was in tatters and that I was bleeding profusely. Strangely I felt no pain. I heard movement and immediately began crying for help, but was warned to be quiet. Obviously it was not German soldiers in the immediate vicinity. Helping hands picked me up and untied my Mae West; I had responded to training and had by instinct got rid of my parachute silk on hitting the ground. When I awoke I was lying on something very soft, but could not see what it was. My right leg gave me a lot of pain and I ran my hands over it. It seemed to be a peculiar shape. Gradually my hearing improved and I could hear voices in what seemed to be prayer. As yet, I could not see where the sound was coming from, but realised that I was being addressed in English. A doctor had been called and he was advising me that there was nothing he could do to treat my wounds, but that he would make me comfortable until the Germans arrived. A couple of pieces of wood from the garden fence were used to make splints for the leg that had sustained a very bad fracture. My face and hands were washed clean of blood that had come from multiple scratches. After making me comfortable and allowing me to sleep for the remainder of the night the Germans were called. As soon as they arrived the atmosphere changed. What had been a quite room now became a very noisy area indeed. I was to be taken away by them, but it appeared that the family would not permit the enemy to move me from the sofa on which I was

resting. Finally I was carried, still on the sofa, to the waiting lorry. I discovered some 50 years later that the family name was Conen and I had the pleasure of meeting the only surviving member.

A GUEST OF THE GERMAN NAVY

Somewhere around teatime, my guards deposited me at a hospital staffed by German navy personnel. I was well scrubbed and put into a nice clean bed. A meal of Black bread, cheese from a tube and the foulest tasting coffee was given to me. All the time I was eating, sailors wandered by to take a look at the English captive.

My next real visit was from a medical officer who explained that there would be a need to operate on my leg in the next few hours. He was quite friendly and was in no way what I had expected. Maybe this was part of the softening-up process I had been warned to expect in those briefing sessions in training. Some time later I was taken to the operating theatre and knew no more until I woke up in a private room with a large picture window on the left and a pair of doors to the right of my bed. There I lay, with my leg in traction but with no sign of a plaster cast. A large iron framework kept the sheets from weighing on my legs. Looking further to my right I saw a German sailor standing guard inside the doors and beyond him, another sailor, both with fixed bayonets! I was told afterwards that these guards were there to keep Belgian people out, for there was no way I could possibly escape.

What lay ahead of me? Meals were delivered on time and once I had become used to the black bread and acorn coffee, the rest of my diet was quite pleasant. Strangely enough, I felt very little pain and I was able to see quite well. After a few days my Rosary was returned to me and it transpired that one of my guards was a Catholic. Now we had a talking point, but he was not particularly interested in teaching me German, but wished to improve his English so that he would be able to converse with English citizens when Germany defeated England! Sign language was used more often than words in the first instance, but we got along very well indeed.

At first, time passed pretty quickly. When night fell I would listen for the sound of allied aircraft passing overhead and try to work out where they might be going, by working out the time that elapsed between the inward and outward journey. Sometimes an airman would be brought in to occupy the second bed in the room, and I would become updated with the progress of the war. Sadly, there was seldom a time when any of these new aircrew members stayed longer than one day. As the weather outside improved I began to yearn for a move to somewhere among English speaking prisoners. I was aware that there were no prisoners from the allied forces in the hospital in which I was being treated.

Early in June, fighter activity began to increase quite dramatically and the air raid sirens were often sounded. Each time this happened my guards disappeared and I soon found out that part of their duties was to man part of the air defences. I cannot remember the date, but one evening, I noticed that the night sky was rapidly illuminated with brightly coloured flares. This could only mean one thing - the area was to be the target for that night ! ! !

I was right. Sirens wailed and anti-aircraft guns blasted away at the allied aircraft. Soon, bombs began to fall and I heard explosion after explosion. Surely I was not going to be a victim of action

by the R.A.F? Soon I had my answer for my bedroom shook and glass windows broke. The noise was horrendous and because of my situation, I could take no action whatever to hide away or to reach shelter. Just as I pulled the bed sheets over my head, I felt an almighty crash and wondered what the outcome of this was going to be. Gradually the noise subsided and soon I was able to risk turning down the sheets. The window and doorframes were lying across the cage that protected my legs, and I saw searchlight beams and ack- ack bursts. THE CEILING HAD COLLAPSED! ! ! ! I was alive but terrified. What would happen to me now? One of my guards visited to check on my condition, but it was some hours before I was made aware of the extent of the damage caused by the raid. My room was reasonably sound when compared to the rest of the hospital.

A Change of Surroundings.

As the morning passed, I could hear the sound of rescue crews moving about the hospital grounds. Now and then there would be an almighty crash as a building toppled. Fires burned brightly and soot fell, making my once white bed linen look very dirty indeed. I thought for a time about the times when I had been bombed back in England and how enemy fighters had attempted to destroy the barrage-balloon sites on which I served, but I am afraid it gave me little comfort. There I had been among friends, but now I was among enemies. How would they re-act to the night's events? I was soon to find out.

From the background of soot and smoke, there appeared the figure of one of the surgeons who had cared for me over the previous weeks. His apron was bloodstained, and in his hand he held a scalpel, likewise covered in blood! What was he going to do to me? He soon put my mind at rest and after referring to the air-raid being carried out by my friends, he told me that although I should be in traction for a further four weeks, there was nothing that could be done but to remove the pin and other items, and transfer me as quickly as possible to another hospital.

No sooner said than done! I just had to grit my teeth, hold tight and the job was done. A lorry was drawn up to the ruin and a stretcher was brought from somewhere, and I was loaded aboard for my journey, no guards this time. Off we went, sometimes dodging the potholes, but more often than not there would be an almighty jolt as we hit what I presumed was a crater. Suddenly the stretcher left the floor of the vehicle and I was deposited on to the boards. I felt more pain than I had felt since leaving the aircraft, but try as I may, I could not get the attention of the driver. Another gritting of teeth until we reached our destination, which turned out to be a "Rest Home" for German officers.

I got little sympathy and was informed that there was not the facility to deal with my new injury, which was a re-fractured femur; the fall had undone the work that had been done. Soon, I was on my way again to another hospital, somewhere in Brussels. I was hungry, dirty and in quite some pain, but at last I reached my new home. The hospital sister was not at all pleased at the state I was in. She was unaware of what I had been through and commented that surely no soldier would set out on a mission in the dirty state that I was in. "Stand up and follow me to the bathroom," she said. Only when I had convinced her that my leg was broken did she realise the predicament I was

in. Immediately her attitude changed. She became an angel and remained so for the rest of my stay.
Now spotlessly clean, I was placed in a bed in a barrack room along with twenty or so captured allied aircrew, and learned that I was in an annexe to a German military hospital in the centre of Brussels. They were not too happy to hear that I had been captured several weeks earlier, and thus could not give news of the allied advance through France. To be honest, I was pleased to know that our forces were on their way. My next information was that I would have twenty-four hours to talk about my predicament and then the subject would be taboo. My "Angel" returned to prepare me for an operation on my right femur.
She explained the whole process and commented on how lucky I was going to be to have a leading surgeon carrying out a recent technique, to put my bone together again (I have since learned that the procedure was known as The Kuetschner Nail Method). Off we went to the theatre, and the surgeon began his task. He was far from happy when I yelled with pain! I had felt his scalpel cut into my upper leg!! Initially he did not believe me, but quickly realised that the spinal anaesthetic had not done its work. At once he took steps to remedy the matter and my next memory was that of waking up in bed, again in traction, and being cared for by a young lady in white. Was I in heaven? No, I was back in the P.O.W. ward.
The following morning, the operating surgeon came to check on my well-being and to apologise for the slip up of the previous day. He told me that the operation had gone well and that I would be in traction for approximately twelve weeks. Where had I heard that before? Now I was able to learn about my fellow prisoners and to catch up on the progress of hostilities.
My colleagues were from all parts of the Commonwealth, U.S.A and France, and there was even a prisoner with Russian nationality. Their injuries were of many kinds. Severe burns, broken limbs and some had limbs that had been amputated. I was only a small player.

Chapter 4: ON THE MOVE AGAIN

Many and varied were the tales my fellow patients had to tell. One especially, bears repeating. After the aircraft had been hit, the radio-operator had moved to leave his position when the aircraft broke up and he was left hanging from a piece of wreckage, but he was still wearing his helmet with the inter-com plug connected. His parachute opened and pulled him from the aircraft but not before he had removed the plug. Suddenly the unit gave way and the cord from the headset caught in the lines of the `chute. He landed unable to move. He arrived at the hospital fully conscious and able to speak but it was quite a few weeks before he was able to use any of his limbs. Part of his recovery programme was to attempt using a concertina. The last time I saw him, he was still struggling.
Each new arrival brought news of the progress of Allied forces; often their stories were very much different from the propaganda given out by the German radio, and the tales told by the staff of the hospital. The weeks passed quickly, and as August approached, the sound of heavy gunfire increased. The news from Belgian workpeople was that the allies were now close to Brussels.

Each day we waited for good news but it seemed to us that movement had come to a halt. Perhaps the forward push had ceased or the powers that be had decided to by-pass the capital. On the 6th September, we had a visit from the senior officer of the hospital staff. He was ready to leave us in the hospital if the senior British officer would sign a document stating that we had been treated well during our captivity. We were overjoyed and were 100% ready to agree! The day passed agonisingly slowly and the night was full of the noise of artillery fire. There was nowhere for us to find shelter so we hid our concern by singing the tunes of the time.

As dawn broke, the sound of gunfire decreased and the sky was red with flame. Surely we would be recaptured in an hour or two! The doors of the annexe burst open and a number of German troops appeared. To our horror they wore the uniform of the S.S. Thoughts of being recaptured were dashed as the officer in command refused to accept the document signed the previous day. The walking wounded were ushered away and the bedridden lifted into wheelchairs. I was released from my traction, given a set of crutches and told to make my way to the bus, which was waiting. I soon had the knack of using crutches for the S.S. were in no mood to hang about. When it was clear that there were no other Allied prisoners left in the hospital, the bus moved off and we turned into the main square where we saw the Palais de Justice burning fiercely. There seemed to be thousands of troops moving about and heading out of the city. Slowly, yard-by-yard, we passed among the crowds, and at last reached the road signposted "VENLO". We were on our way to Holland but much was to happen before we reached our goal.

The roads were packed with retreating German troops and fleeing Belgian citizens. Every available type of transport was being used to leave the capital, and there was barely enough space to pass that which had already broken down. Dead animals littered the roadside. Horses lay with their feet in the air, dead either from attack from the air or just sheer exhaustion. Broken down vehicles littered the highway, their owners frantically seeking alternative means of escape. This was organised retreat? Suddenly, above the din, we heard the sound of fighter aircraft and then recognised the planes as Typhoons, not only that but our Senior British Officer made us aware that they were from his own squadron!!!

Within seconds the pilots began their attack on the fleeing troops and it was plain that we were not to be spared. The bus stopped, but our guards would not allow us to dismount and seek shelter. They were armed and we were not but the S.B.O. took his life in his hands and hurled himself at the nearest guard who immediately dropped his rifle and, together with his colleague, left the vehicle. We helped one another off the bus and headed for farm buildings nearby. The pigs were hastily evicted and we took their places. The sty was strongly built and we felt a good deal safer. Three of the walking wounded decided that this was an ideal opportunity to attempt an escape.

I know for certain that one, Sgt. W. Durland was successful, for his story was told in the records of 514 Squadron which was my own squadron. I have not heard the outcome of the others who made the attempt. At last the aircraft broke off their attack and we were ordered to re-board the bus which was undamaged and we noticed that there was no Red Cross insignia, Squadron

Leader Brannigan was not too sure that a red cross would have made very much difference to the attack, as the bus was slap in the centre of the fleeing convoy. Slowly we moved on again.
The damage reeked on the fleeing army was horrendous and one could only feel pity for the wounded and dying, as each person in the convoy seemed bent on one task - to reach shelter and perhaps safety. As the day drew to a close, we felt a little safer, for we were aware that fighter aircraft would not operate in the dark and bombers would be too expensive to use against targets such as a fleeing convoy.
It was quite dark when we drew into the suburbs of Venlo, but we now came under attack from Dutch citizens who thought that we were German soldiers being carried away from the front-line. Fortunately no great damage was done and at last we were deposited at a Convent near the centre of the town. Our first thought was, "When are we going to get something to eat?" and then we became puzzled as to why we had been taken to the very top floor of the Convent.
The second question was answered by the Mother Superior who informed us that the senior German officer in the town did not want the responsibility of looking after us, perhaps if we remained hidden on the top floor advancing German troops would pass us by. You will remember we had heard a similar tale before.
For four days we remained hidden. We had reasonable food and excellent facilities. Perhaps this time we would be recaptured. It was not to be. On the morning of the fifth day, one of our number decided to investigate the troop noises in the street below. Sadly his appearance on the balcony was noticed by the civilian population below. They waved and he acknowledged their greeting, but was spotted by a soldier who was passing by. It had to be a member of the S.S.! Within minutes, we were taken into the grounds of the convent and I believe that the others felt as I did, we were going to be executed !!! To our great relief, this did not happen. A few hours later we were put aboard railway wagons to be transported into Germany.

INTO THE THIRD REICH

At the railway station, we were kept strictly apart from the civilian travellers who were boarding trains for various parts of Germany, and we were ushered towards a row of cattle trucks standing in a siding. The doors at the side of the trucks were open and we could see barbed wire, which was stretched across the width of the truck separating the interior into two sections. On the left were a number of palliasses, and to the right a cast iron wood burning stove and three bunks. We realised that this was to be our mode of transport for the next leg of our journey.
The guards occupied the section with the stove and we were to travel in the other section, but where we were heading, no-one would tell us. We came to the conclusion that our trip was not going to be a long one, for there was no food or drink aboard. The doors slammed shut; we heard the locks on our side being closed and then we were on our way. There were eight of us, and three very old men acting as guards. It was very dark and the soldiers had no wish to converse just yet but as we moved into the countryside, we learned that the men were really "Home Guards" and were terrified of authority, and for some reason, equally terrified of us. We had been classified as dangerous prisoners!

Uncomfortable as it was we gradually fell asleep, only to be woken up by a string of German oaths and the sight of one of the guards frantically trying to beat out the flames coming from his very long ersatz overcoat. He had got too near the stove, which was now glowing in the dark. His companions came to his aid, and soon all was quiet, except for the injured guard who was now afraid of his fate when he came to the end of his journey and would have to report the incident. There was nothing we could do to help treat his burns, for we were separated from him by the barbed wire screen. As evening approached, the following day we pulled into a siding and the doors were opened. We had not travelled far as we could hear voices calling, "Dusseldorf! Dusseldorf"- this was our destination.

We dismounted and after a few moments, our party was separated into two groups, the RA.F. to one side and the U.S.A.A.F to the other. The American section was put aboard a bus and immediately moved from the station. We never saw them again. As for us, we boarded a truck and moved out of the city. The journey to our destination did not take very long and we eventually stopped at a camp which we soon realised was a Workers Camp.

It was divided into four compounds, which housed French, Italian, Polish and Russian citizens who were forced to work in the locality. Our quarters were to be in the French section and a few hours after our arrival, we were allocated three Russian prisoners to serve our every need. It was not too long before we realised that there was a definite pecking order at the camp.

After the Germans, the French were the pampered race. The Italians came next, followed by the Polish inmates and a very very long way behind came the Russians. Germans did not stand guard over the Russian compound, they left that to the Polish group and the Russian group provided the guard for the Polish compound ! !

At this stage we found it very difficult to comprehend the attitude of the Germans towards the Russian and the Polish people, after all, we had not been subject to the rule of the Nazi regime, and as yet, had met none of the cruelty meted out to the races they, the Germans, had conquered. Not many days were to pass before we saw examples of such cruelty, and it was with disbelieve that we saw Russian captives digging holes in the ground, into which they placed their dead comrades.

At least the Polish dead were given a decent burial service, and had fellow countrymen saying a prayer or two at the graveside and in some cases, placing a small wooden cross to mark the spot where the internment had taken place. Why were there so many deaths among these two races? The Russian captives would be given food only if they carried out a day's work and this explained why they were so eager to be our "servants". The food we gave them was perhaps sufficient to keep them alive for a few days longer, and even to build up their strength to resume the work they were ordered to carry out for their German captors, so obtaining further rations.

It was so sad to witness the actions of these poor creatures when they scrambled for a cigarette end, a crust of bread or any other morsels discarded by us. They took enormous risks to find a hole in the barbed wire, through which they'd visit our quarters and offer to carry out the most menial tasks for a very meagre reward.

Our next concern was more to do with ourselves, we seemed to be receiving rather a lot of French Red Cross parcels and the British parcels were turning up in the French section, but were issued to French workers. Really it was the shortage of English cigarettes and chocolate that triggered the enquiry.

The British Red Cross parcel was superior in every way to the French one, and the contents much greater in both calorific value and for the purposes of bartering. At the meeting we held with the French quartermaster, we discovered that the French believed that, as they were used as workers by the Germans, they were entitled to the better products in the British parcel. It must be noted here that Senior N.C.O.s and Officers were not obliged to work for the enemy and very rarely did so.

The plight of the other inmates in the camp was not considered by the French. The atmosphere was somewhat strained for the next couple of weeks and I think both sides were happy when it became known that the R.A.F. were to be moved on, again no hint of our destination was given.

The day of our departure arrived and I was asked by the Medical Officer in the camp to forego my crutches and use sticks in future. With some hesitation I acceded to his request and was able to walk out of the compound.

We were ferried to the station at Dusseldorf and saw a city devastated by bombing. The majority of the workers in the repair gangs were women, and we discovered that these were Russian. They looked wretched. Armed guards surrounded the area in which they were working. Quickly we boarded the cattle trucks, which were similar to those in which we had travelled from Venlo.

This time there were no incidents. Eventually we disembarked at a town called Menningen in the district of Thuringia. Our home was to be in a beautiful Opera House, which had been stripped of its finery to accommodate large numbers of P.O.W.s.

The residents were for the most part captives from the Arnheim operation, but there were also many aircrew held in the wire compounds. Entertainment seemed to be the order of the day. Impromptu concerts seemed to take place daily, added to which was the opportunity to view a group of circus performers who were camped outside the fence. Somehow, they seemed to have dodged the call-up.

Food was of the highest quality, or maybe we were now becoming used to taste of ersatz; ersatz that was frequently embellished with the contents of Red Cross parcels. Almost daily the number of prisoners grew and it became obvious that some would soon have to be moved on, but no one really wished to go. Despite the overcrowding, the camp was reasonably comfortable. Perhaps this was because it was classed as a re-habilitation unit. It was with some regret that we took the journey to the station, there to board compartments of an ordinary passenger train but still guarded by Home Guards.

It was night time when we neared Frankfurt, and the train was diverted into a siding as an air raid was taking place on the city. We disembarked at around ten a.m., and as we left the platform, we were attacked by German citizens who wanted revenge for the raid which had taken place the previous evening. Who could really blame them? Our guards fixed bayonets and eventually drove

the angry people away. Not all were happy to leave, and some followed the tramcar, which was to take us to the interrogation centre just outside the town. Bricks rattled against the coachwork. Metal bars were used to smash windows, but our guards stuck to their task and we escaped without injury.

Chapter 5: STALAG LUFT 1XC KRAYSBURG

The dreaded DULAG LUFT !!! So often the subject of talks back in Britain. Here we could expect to be questioned on the activities of the R.A.F. and secret equipment of the Allied Forces. We had been instructed to provide only our Service number, Rank and Name and under no circumstances to enter into any discussion.

At once we were placed in cells which had only a bed on which was a straw palliasse, and by the door a device to attract the attention of the guards when the "Call of Nature" came. This gadget was used frequently so keeping the guards busy, they were not happy about this ploy to keep them on the move and the language they used to describe the prisoners was pretty choice. A childish prank but effective.

Messages in Morse code were tapped out on the walls between cells and on pipe work, but the contents were not within my knowledge of the Morse code even though the use of the code had been part of the navigator's course. Food was very poor. As the first day in solitary confinement drew to a close I realised that this was the first time I had really been alone since my capture, I was on my own.

There was no window in the room that I occupied, so I tried to get to sleep and to prepare myself for the interrogation I was to face very soon now. Would it be as testing as I had been led to believe back in England? The heat in the cell was overbearing and there was practically no ventilation, so it was no great surprise that I slept very fitfully and by morning I was not a very happy P.O.W.

The introduction to the camp was so weird. Between the entrance gate and the outer fence were a number of small wooden structures that looked exactly like dog-kennels, and each one of us was told to creep into one of these leaving our kit outside. There we remained for some time until ordered out again and told to retrieve the items that had been left outside. Next we were given a number and admitted into the main compound. The number was that of the barrack room we would occupy for the time we would be at the camp.

There was a reception committee and a barrage of questions about the progress of hostilities, but alas, there was little we could add to what they already knew for the majority, had been captured much later than we had. At last there was time to look around the room. It contained four sets of bunk beds, each with a paper palliasse filled with straw, supported by a few wooden boards. A small cupboard took up the space at the side of each set of beds. Near one wall was a cast iron stove with a chimney disappearing through the ceiling. Strung between the walls, were lines of string on which hung articles of clothing that had recently been washed. A shuttered window took

up part of the remaining wall. It did not take long for me to be introduced to my room mates and to be advised which "mess" I would join.
Next I was told of procedures and the daily routine of the camp. In no time at all I was asleep. "Raus!! Raus!!" Such a banging and clattering, it was time to rise, dress and present our selves for roll call. What a motley collection! There we stood in ranks of five, lined up on three sides of the huge open square. German soldiers counted us five by five and informed the senior N.C.O. of the total number present. On a cold, bleak day this procedure lasted for no longer than 20 minutes but when weather conditions were good all sorts of pranks were played to keep the prison staff employed for anything up to two hours.
Each block was allocated a time for taking a shower-cold- and once each week there was the luxury of a hot shower if you managed to get a place at the head of the queue. On odd occasions clothes could be bagged and passed through a steam plant but this procedure was not popular as clothes tended to shrink so the cold water wash was the most sought after. The food we were served was appalling but we were informed that it was the same as that served to equivalent ranks in the German Forces, this was very difficult to accept and it made us eternally thankful for the extra items we received in the Red Cross parcels now regularly provided.
Perhaps it would be beneficial to mention what the parcels contained.
A British parcel would have in it basic items for providing nourishment, such as tinned bacon, tinned sausages, tinned margarine, dried milk, chocolate, prunes and a supply of cigarettes and other sundry items.
An American parcel would contain similar articles but the sausages would be replaced by Spam and there would be a larger tin of dried milk, the prunes would be replaced by raisins and in addition there would be toilet soap, much loved by the Germans and so very useful for trading purposes.
A Canadian parcel would be a mixture of the two, and parcels from France and the Commonwealth would generally be in a bulk delivery and passed to the kitchen for general use.
The cardboard, string and empty tins were hoarded and used for many, many purposes. It was truly amazing what could be done by tradesmen who enjoyed practising their civilian skills in the re-cycling of tins etc.
Empty "Klini" tins were just the right size to fit the chimney of the stove and gradually the stove would be extended to-wards the middle or the floor so enabling more people to benefit from the heat generated, unfortunately, just when the stove had reached the centre, the German guards would organise an S.S. visit and not only the stove would be dismantled but many items were confiscated, and food that had been carefully stored, scattered and made quite unfit to eat. In retrospect it seems a futile pastime but at the time, it was a question of trying to outwit the enemy.
Day by day the camp became an organised society. Rules of behaviour were drawn up and strictly adhered to, this was very necessary for the well being of all concerned.
Educational sessions became the norm and talks and lectures provided an additional interest for those not interested in studying for examinations, the results of which would be accepted on return

to the UK Again materials and exam papers were provided by the Red Cross.
Entertainment was a must. Regular concerts were organised and again the inmates showed great prowess in making scenery and costumes from "bits and pieces".
News of the progress of hostilities was produced from I know not where, but there was a clandestine radio in use. Bulletins were issued on a daily basis, and of course, each new batch of prisoners was questioned on initial admission to the camp.
At the beginning of December, the weather changed for the worse. Snow fell and the temperatures dropped alarmingly. The walks which had been taken daily, now became runs but physical effort burned up energy and food supplies were not good, however, a supply of ice skates arrived, and soon work started on constructing a makeshift ice rink. The Canadians among us were overjoyed as gradually the rink took shape. Promises of skating lessons were made and for a few days hunger was forgotten.
Christmas would soon be with us and of course an entertainment to beat all previous efforts was to be produced.
A few days before these marvellous dreams were to become reality, there was the sound of aircraft overhead, not British, not German, but on closer examination, these were found to be Russian planes. What was happening? The news bulletins had said nothing of this but it now became obvious by the behaviour of the German troops that something was amiss.
We were ordered to leave the outdoor areas whenever an air-raid siren sounded. Sadly, one airman lost his life when he re-acted too slowly to this order. Perhaps the reader can imagine the tension that now built up within the camp. Few were brave enough to leave the barrack blocks and arrangements had to be made to ensure that those bringing food from the cookhouse were not made targets, should a raid occur on the journey. The number housed had been increased because places had to be found for new inmates that now included Glider pilots, victims of the raid on Arnheim.
Twelve bodies now filled the space previously used by four. It was essential that discipline was maintained and thanks to previous training , it was. A few days passed and the sound of heavy artillery was heard. There was little doubt that the Russian forces were not too far away. Were they aware that we were in the area? My mind went back to the advance on Brussels and the hope we had of being released. No promises were made this time. We received orders to gather our scant belongings together and prepare for a long trek to a camp within the German border. No transport would be available and the snow was still very deep. How would we survive? Makeshift rucksacks were made as were sleds that would carry food and equipment during the coming days. Some acted in groups but the majority elected to be responsible for their own future.
Christmas Day 1944. The gates of the camp were opened and we set out on our journey. The guards took up their positions either side of the column, thankful that they were not being left to face the advancing Russian forces. No longer were we the enemy, but a means of escape into the Fatherland.

Not many hours had passed when we realised that civilians had joined the column. Old men, women and children, all striving to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the enemy. They were terrified that they would become prisoners of those who their own propaganda had warned were little better than animals. It was not long before mothers asked us to care for their children, and overnight, we found that we had been left with several young boys and girls, hoping that they would be safe with us. Obviously this was not possible, and at the first village we reached, we made provision for them to be transported by the German authorities. I often wondered what became of those children.
The greatest barrier we faced was at the River Oder. There was a town on our route -0ppeln- but we would not be passing through this town, but would walk across the frozen river. Now we were in Germany proper. The next stop on our journey would be the huge camp at Llamsdorf. This camp had been used as a camp during World War I. Now it was home to thousands of prisoners of every nationality where Germans had occupied the country of origin.

Chapter 6: LLAMSDORF AND BEYOND.

This camp filled me with foreboding. It was huge and the inmates looked so intimidating as they took their daily exercise. Gaunt figures in clothing which had seen better days, faces deeply etched showing that they had not had quite so comfortable a time as we who had just joined them. Many had spent several years in Llamsdorf and were looking towards the final days of captivity. We soon learnt that although the appearances were poor there was still spirit and determination within the wire. The family atmosphere of Kraysburg was absent but the organisation necessary to provide a reasonable code of conduct was definitely in place. The quarters I was allocated were cold and damp; the only heating coming from the personnel living in the cramped space. Personal hygiene was not of a very high standard and the attitude of my companions bordered on hopelessness. My thoughts turned towards getting myself moved to some other section of the camp where life would not seem so dreary. I was not prepared for events of the next few days.
As at Kraysburg, a make shift open-air ice-rink had been constructed and tiered seating had been installed. Obviously not all had the same approach as my room-mates. Crowds gathered in the freezing air to watch an ice hockey game between a Canadian side and a side made up of various nationalities. It was exciting and many looked forward to further contests as well as using the rink simply for amusement.
I was granted my move, but after only a few hours, was ordered to pack what few possessions I had and join a group of sick and lame colleagues for onward transfer. Enquiries revealed that our small group was being transferred to yet another camp where we would be medically examined to determine whether or not we were suitable for repatriation. A couple of hours train journey took us to a camp specifically for army N.C.O's. The rest of the day was spent preparing ourselves for inspection when we appeared before the panel of Swiss Red Cross Medical Officers who would decide our future. Would I be repatriated? "No!" was the short answer but I would remain at the new camp. Here was a camp where 90% of the inmates had been captive since Dunkirk. The

organisation was superb! Units in which I had been stationed back in the U.K. were not any better than this. I am sad to say that I cannot remember the name of this camp. Every inmate seemed to want to help the newcomer. Of course this could not last. This had been the story of my life for almost a year. The Russians were coming. This time I was able to ready myself for the next move. We were advised to gather in groups of four and to ensure that there was not more than one "Disabled" person in each group. When all was ready we evacuated the camp and set off to face what was to be a pretty horrific experience.

During the daylight hours we rested in pine forests or on farms on our route south. At night we walked and walked and walked. This arrangement was made so that our winding columns would not be mistaken for marching German troops and so become targets for any roving aircraft. Whenever possible we would stock up on food. Crops would be raided and farmyard animals killed to provide sustenance for hungry mouths. I was appointed quartermaster for our small group mainly because I was not ruthless enough to carry out the pilfering necessary to sustain the four of us, whereas the others had become skilled in the art during the long years of working on German farms and in factories. I was most fortunate and shall be eternally grateful to my colleagues.

After several weeks of "marching" we arrived at a railway siding and were ordered to board cattle trucks for the next leg of the journey. Forty men and their equipment to each truck!!!! How degrading this was cannot be imagined. Toilet facilities were none existent and as each stretch of the journey was carried out during the hours of darkness, it was such a relief when dawn came and the doors to the truck were opened. Cold though the weather was, there was no hesitation should there be a stream nearby. The first task was to wash and prepare for the next night's journey. Now there was not a supply of Red Cross parcels and we relied upon the rations provided by our captors, these were very meagre indeed. Tempers frayed but astonishingly there was no pilfering of supplies.

After almost three weeks travelling back and forth across the operating rail system we came to a halt at a major railway station. PRAGUE! Much to our surprise we received hot soup from ladies who were the equivalent of the W.V.S. and we were allowed to draw water from the boiler of the engine to make tea (those who still possessed tea leaves), but sadly, our stomachs could not cope with the intake of potato soup and brackish water, many P.O.W's were very sick indeed. Another day passed and once again we journeyed along the rail system until there was just nowhere to go by rail.

Trucks were unloaded and prisoners and their guards set off over the countryside. At about this time the older guards were taken away to bolster the army elsewhere and their places taken by schoolboys enlisted in the Hitler Youth Movement. The situation was very delicate as the majority of these young boys were fanatical in their hatred of the enemies of the Reich. Time and time again they treated their prisoners cruelly and took little notice of the older members of the guard. On at least two occasions, prisoners were killed because of their failure to respond quickly to instructions from some youngster. When a batch of Red Cross parcels appeared there was increased tension as these were strictly for distribution to captives, and the new guards were

loathe to hand the parcels over. Common sense prevailed and the daily routine continued. On and on we roamed unaware of our destination or indeed the final outcome.
An overnight stay at a camp near Munich, too crowded to receive any other bodies, simply helped to fix our position and to receive news of the progress of the war. A few more days and our section of the column was ordered to stay in a primary school building in the Austrian village of Kirschberg. Now we were in the American battle area. We settled into our new billet under the watchful eyes of the local population, and slept through the sound of gunfire and raiding aircraft. Dawn broke and there was no sign of guards of any age. Walking out of the school I saw many inhabitants walking towards a church nearby and on enquiring whose feast day it was, I received the answer, " The war is over."
On the 7th May 1945 a troop of American soldiers appeared and gave the official news. They left sufficient food and other items to supply a small army. With great care born out of weeks of shortage, we divided the rations and prepared to be taken to an Allied base.
It was such a strange feeling to be free to wander where we pleased. There was an airfield at Strauben a few miles away and it was towards this that we headed, only to find that every aircraft had been destroyed and so were unfit for our use. Nothing for it, but to wait for the U.S. Army to return and arrange for us to be transferred the United Kingdom. The food we had been given was strange to us, the white, fluffy bread and real butter seemed to be so unappetising after the rough rations we had become used to.
Almost a week passed before an army truck arrived, and our journey home began. Our destination was the airfield at Rheims in France and on arrival, we saw several Lancasters with crews. These were to be the means by which we would finally make the journey home. Groups of ex- prisoners were allocated to each aircraft, told to hang on to anything they could and in a very short time we would land at an RA.F. base at Wing. Once again there was disappointment for my group. The Navigator for the aircraft had "gone missing". Wasn't I a Navigator? The pilot was quite prepared to trust my ability to map read until he could pick up radio contact. So, away we went and each occupant of the aircraft was allowed in turn to visit the flight deck and view the white cliffs of Dover as we approached England.
After landing at Wing we were escorted to a huge marquee where we suffered the indignity of being fumigated, given a cursory medical examination and then the luxury of a very hot shower. Almost three and a half stones lighter and almost unrecognisable from the person who had left on the disastrous trip to Aachen - I was home.

Chapter 7: FIFTY YEARS ON.

The next two years were somewhat confused. I was still a Navigator but, because of the injuries I had received, I was no longer considered medically fit to resume flying duties. Added to this the R.A.F. had a surfeit of flying personnel, now that hostilities had ceased. What was I to do? I had no desire to serve as a member of ground staff. I chose to accept discharge.

I attempted to contact the families of my crew but had little success. Only one person replied to my letters. It was to be some fifty years before contact was made and this came about in strange circumstances.

In 1990 I attended a Squadron Re-union at Waterbeach and was asked if I had any item which could be displayed in a Museum which was to be housed at the airfield, now the home of the Royal Engineers. I felt that my P.O.W. Idenitity Card would be of some interest among the stories and photographs of operational sorties. Little did I know that this exhibit was going to open up again the search for relatives of my crew! On the 27th October 1992, Mr. Clive Hill, who was the nephew of Clive Banfield, our Flight Engineer, visited the museum in his search for information concerning the flying career of his late uncle. As he was leaving the building he spotted the Identity Card and at once realised that, as only one 514 Lancaster did not return on the 11th April 1944, the person in the picture must be the sole survivor he had been trying to find.

Several letters and telephone calls resulted in a meeting being arranged at my home on 6th April, 1993. Contact was established with Bill Thackray in Australia, and soon family members of other crew members had been found. Despite all Clive's efforts, there was no trace of the Wireless Operator or the relief Navigator.

In May, 1995 Bill Thackray and his wife Hazel, travelled to Europe and spent some time visiting the War Cemetery where the six members of Lancaster LL639 were interred. They too visited the Museum and called on us at Worksop. It was possible for Clive to join us and, of course, I was able to enlighten them regarding the fateful night, 11th April 1944. Many relevant questions were asked and answered and it was resolved that we would be keeping in touch from that day forth.

For the following two years, Clive continued with his research of the incident. He spared no effort in obtaining data regarding the incident and produced an account of the last hours of the aircraft and crew, finally drawing the whole story together in a highly illustrated book, "Investigation into the loss of 514 Squadron Lancaster II LL639 on 11th April 1944." His research had taken him to the village of Molenbeersel in Belgium where he met the remaining member of the Conen family who had been so kind to me and several others, who had witnessed the crash or had been young children at the time and heard the story from their parents.

Obviously the matter could not rest at that and soon arrangements were in hand to erect a memorial to ensure the incident would not be forgotten -

A site was cleared and the villagers built a structure to house a plaque concerning the event. The date for the dedication was set and Mrs. Hill (the sister of Clive Banfield), her husband, myself and my wife, Clive and Judith and several residents were present at the dedication. Nothing was too much trouble for the people of the area who were still full of praise for those who had released them from the strain of the years of the Second World War.

The friendship formed over that weekend has not been allowed to lapse.

The inscription on the plaque reads:

THIS MEMORIAL WAS ERECTED AS A TRIBUTE TO:

P/O N.W.F. THACKRAY PILOT RAAF
SGT. C.W. BANFIELD FLIGHT ENGINEER RAFVA
SGT. R HUGHES WIRELESS OPERATOR RAFVR
F/SGT. J.R. MOULSDALE AIR BOMBER RAAF
F/SGT. C.H. HENN M.U. GUNNER RAAF
F/SGT. R.E BROMLEY R. GUNNER RAAF
WHO DIED WHEN THEIR AIRCRAFT - LANCASTER LL639 OF 514 SQUADRON RAF
CRASHED AT THIS SITE ON 11 APRIL 1944 RETURNING FROM A
NIGHT BOMBING RAID TO AACHEN
ERECTED IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SOLE SURVIVOR
SGT. E.L. HUMES NAVIGATOR RAF
AND MRS A.G. HILLSISTER OF THE FLIGHT ENGINEER

'NIL OBSTARE POTEST'
11 JULY 1990
PRISONERS OF WAR 514 SQUADRON
F/Sgt. J.D. ALFORD 2/12/43 BERLIN R.A.A.F.
F/O. S. BAXTER 3/8/44 BAL DE CASSON R.A.A.F.
Sgt. A.J. BLACKSHAW 2/2/45 WEISBADEN
FALL J.M.J. BOIJRKE 21/1/44 MAGDEBURG R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. M.J. BOURNE 12/6/44 GELSENKERSCHEN
Sgt. F.W. BROWN 11/5/44 LOUVAIN
Sgt. J. BREWER 21/1/44 MAGDEBURG
F/Sgt D.R. BURNS 11/9/44 KAMEN
Sgt. G.H. BURRIDGE 2/2/45 WEISBADEN
F/Sgt. F.J. CAREY 7/6/44 MASSEY PALAISEAU
Sgt. J. S. CAREY 30/1/44 BERLIN
F/O J.E.S. CLARE 21/1/44 MAGDEBURG R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. J. CLARKE 7/6/44 MASSEY PALAISEAU
Sgt. F. COLLINGWOOD MASSEY PALAISEAU
Sgt. P.G. COOPER 12/6/44 GELSENKIRCHEN
F/Sgt. H.J. COSGROVE 30/3/44 NUREMBERG
P/O A.B. CUNNINGHAM 11/5/44 LOUVAIN R.N.Z.A.F
Sgt S. G. CUTTLER 21/1/44 MAGDEBERG
P/O H.G. DARBY 30/3/44 NUREMBERG
F/Sgt G. DAVIS 20/12/43 FRANKFURT
F/O K.D. DEANS 22/3/44 FRANKFURT
Sgt. E.G. DURLAND 12/8/44 RUSSELSHEIM
W/O W.E. EGRI 3/8/44 BOIS de CASSAN R.C.A.F.

F/O F.J. EISBERG 21/11/44 HOMBURG
Sgt. W.H. ELLIS 21/11/44 HOMBURG
F.O. M.S.C. EMERY 2/12/43 BERLIN
F/O G.C. FRANCE 21/11/44 HOMBURG
Sgt. R. GALLOWAY 2/12/43 BERLIN
F/Sgt E.F. GARLAND 28/7/44 STUTTGART R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. H. GILMORE 3/ 8/44 BOIS de CASSAN
Sgt. G.F. GOOD 11/9/44 KAMEN
F/Sgt R.L. GULLIFORD 30/1/44 BERLIN
F/Sgt. B.S. HAINES 18/11/43 MANNHEIM R.A.A.F
F/Sgt A.D. HALL 30/ 3/44 NUREMBERG R.N.Z.A.F.
F/Lt. G.H.D. HINDE 2/12/43 BERLIN S. Rhodesia
Sgt P. S. HOARE 22/3/44 FRANKFURT
Sgt. G.M. HOLT 12/8/44 RUSSELSHEIM
F.O. P.J.K. HOOD 30/3/44 BERLIN
F/Sgt. E.L. HUMES 11/4/44 AACHEN
T. Sgt. M.G. LANTHIER 30/3/44 BERLIN U.S.A.A.F.
P.O. LWC. LEWIS 7/6/44 MASSEY PALAISEAU
Sgt. R.B. McALLISTER 23/4/44 BERLIN R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. J.R Mc.CLENAGHAN 3/8/44 BOIS de CASSAN R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. C.G.E. McDONALD 30/3/44 NUREMBURG R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt A. Mc. PHEE 30/3/44 NUREMBURG
F.O. W.D. Mc. PHEE 22/3/44 FRANKFURT R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt. C.D. MEDLAND 21/5/44 DUISBERG
F/Sgt. J.E.MALONEY 23/12/44 BERLIN R.A.A.F
Sgt. S.W. MOORE 2I2/45 WEISBADEN
F/Sgt K. MORTIMER 30/1/44 BERLIN
Sgt. W. MUSKET 2/12/43 BERLIN
F/Lt. C. W. NICHOL 22/3/44 FRANKFURT
F/O. R.J. RAMSEY 11/5/44 LOUVAIN
Sgt. J.D. REID 3/8/44 BOIS de CASSAN
F/Sgt. R.J. RIGDEN 12/9/44 FRANKFURT
F/Sgt. A.J. ROBERTSON 30/1/44 BERLIN R.A.A.F.
Sgt. G.F. ROBINSON 28/7/44 STUTTGART
F/O. K.S. ROBINSON 26/8/44 KEIL
Sgt. C.L. ROBINSON 11/9/44 KAMEN R.C.A.F.
F/Sgt V.J. ROLLINGS 30/3/44 NUREMBURG
Sgt. J. SCULLY 3/8/44 BOIS de CASSAN
Sgt. R.C. SIME 22/3/44 FRANKFURT R.C.A.F.

Sgt. R.L. SMITH 21/11/44 MAGDEBURG
Sgt. W.J. STEPHEN 21/12/43 BERLIN
F/Sgt. G.H, STROMBERG 7/6/44 MASSEY PALAISEAU
Sgt. F.C. TOWNSHEND 22/3/44 FRANKFURT
P.O. C.O. TURNER 12/9/44 FRANKFURT
F/Sgt. L.J. VENUS 21/5/44 DUISBERG
P.O. V.H.J.VIZER 21/1/44 MAGDEBURG
F/Sgt. E.J. WALLINGTON 30/1/44 BERLIN
Sgt. H.H. WICKSON 30/3/44 NUREMBURG
F/O R.J.S. WILTON 30/3/44 NUREMBERG
F.O. D.A. WINTERFORD 11/5/44 LOUVAIN
F/Sgt R.J. WOOSNAM 7/6/44 MASSEY PALAISEAU