

## DIARY

October

Wednesday 5th      Junk Sale

Saturday 8th      Jumble sale - church hall Longlevens  
start setting up at 12am, opens at 2pm  
please come along and help

November

Wednesday 2nd      Vintage evening  
bring along old equipment, books etc for an  
informal viewing and talking session

Friday 4th      Skittles at Eldersfield...see Leta for booking etc.

## Jim's Story

Members may recall that Jim, G4OYU, had mentioned flying over the D-Day invasion fleet. Well, Jim has written us an interesting account of his experiences on the bomber mission on which he was shot down....

Well it all began on the night of July 24/25th 1944. We were briefed to bomb Stuttgart for a second time within a week. The first time we had found the target very heavily defended, plenty of flak and night fighters. Well the powers that be decided to use the same route again hoping it would fool the Germans. But of course it didn't. As we approached the target the welcome was very hostile to put it mildly. First of all we saw an aircraft picked up by a master searchlight, he was then coned by a dozen or more beams and try as he might he couldn't get away. Then he was surrounded by anti-aircraft shell bursts and before you could say Jack Robinson he was going down in flames. Well its enough to frighten the living daylight's out of you. We carried on towards the target which was well alight with bombs going off all over the place, we did our bombing run in successfully and did a smart diving turn to head back home as fast as possible. The next thing we knew was we were then caught by that blasted master beam to be followed by the rest of them. It was like being in a raging furnace, the light was so intense it almost blinded you. The skipper proceeded to do violent evasive action and much to our relief we did escape. We found we were down at around 9000 ft, having been at 20000 ft. So we were way below the main bomber stream and on our own.

Well it just wasn't our night. We were suddenly hit by cannon shells which ripped through the port wing knocking out both engines on that side. The flames were streaming out alongside my mid-upper turret. The tail gunner and myself both saw the fighter making a turn in towards us so we both let fly, only to see our tracers falling short. Another belt of cannon



shells came very close but luckily did not score a hit. the skipper was trying his utmost to trim the aircraft to fly on two engines on the starboard side, but he could not hold it and so he gave the order to bale out.

I scrambled out as fast as I could and picking up my chute on the way, clipped it on and headed for the rear door. I saw that Ben had turned his turret round so he could fall out backwards and he was well on his way to safety. I opened the door and looked out, and the thought flashed through my mind, how on earth can I jump without being swept back against the tail which loomed so big just to my right. The next thing I knew I was being pushed out by David the wireless operator in no uncertain manner, he yelled out "for Christ sake get out". Well I was out now and I didn't have time to see how close I came to the tail. I immediately pulled the rip-cord and the chute unfolded above my head and I pulled up with a sudden jolt. It felt very weird floating down in the dark, so peaceful after the noise from 4 Merlins throbbing away, hour after hour. I think I would have enjoyed the thrill of parachuting under different circumstances. I could see the dear old Lanc. blazing furiously some distance away and then finally crashing into the ground with a terrific explosion. It was sad to see her go like that, but at least we were alive.

My next worry was where was I coming down, for looking down I couldn't see any visible sign of what lay below. Before I realised it I was falling through the top of a tree with the branches tearing at my clothing and scratching my face. I came to a sudden stop and realised I was suspended some 15 to 20 ft off the ground. I released my harness whilst hanging on to a branch. I could see my harness was hanging some distance below me so I made my way down this and fell the remaining distance to the ground. I could see I was in a forest of some sort as there were sawn trees piled up quite near by. It was just beginning to get light, I guess it would be around 3 to 4 in the morning. I could hear the remainder of our boys heading for home, how I envied them.

My face was covered in blood from being scratched by the branches. My first reaction was to get away from there as far as possible, so I ran off in a southerly direction using the compass which was disguised as a tunic button. I soon came to the edge of the forest and discovered I was up on top of a hill, just below me was a small village about a mile away, all looked peaceful so I followed a hedgerow along the escarpment as I could see another forest on the opposite side of the valley from me. That was where I next planned to go. then I saw a lorry travelling along the road below me, a road I had to cross. I was getting a bit worried because time was getting on and the road might become busy, so I decided I would hide up for the day and continue on after dark. I found a nice little cubby-hole in a dry ditch under the hedge at the top of a field of turnips. I settled down and had a cigarette and looked at my escape pack which consisted of a map of Europe, a bar of chocolate, malted milk tablets and some glucose tablets. Not much to go on. I'd rather have had my bacon and egg. Round about 8 o'clock I heard voices getting nearer and nearer so I took a quick look and found to my horror that a crowd of men and women with their hoes were hoeing weeds out between the rows of turnips and were getting very close to where I was hidden. When they had reached the top of the field most of the men sat down and pulled out their pipes or cigarettes, while



the women carried on back down the field. They were only a few yards away, so I made myself as small as possible. One of the men got up and turned in my direction and had a pee. Thank the Lord he hadn't taken a few more steps as I should then have copped the lot.

As the day wore on they gradually moved further away from me, so I lay back and fell sound asleep. I woke up with a start wondering where on earth I was. But looking around soon put me wise. The time was late evening and I was parched and very hungry. I waited until it was almost dark, then crawled out feeling very stiff and dirty. Looking around I couldn't see any signs of activity in the village or along the road threading its way through the valley which lay between the two forests. I took to my heels and ran down the hill scooting across the road, then sprinting up the hill, I made my way into the forest and concealment. I had decided to head south in the general direction of Switzerland. The going became very exhausting as I was ploughing through dense undergrowth and didn't seem to be making much progress. My feet were killing me. I can assure you that walking in flying boots is no joke. The perspiration was pouring off me and my clothes were sticking to me. I had, of course, dumped my flying suit which was a very bright yellow and would have stood out like a sore thumb. The forest seemed to go on for ever. Then in the early hours I heard the unmistakable sound of Merlin engines. The boys were on the war-path again, I wondered where. Well, it was Stuttgart again, sounding "crump crump" as the bombs came raining down, and causing huge fires which I could clearly see. But I guess it must have been about 20 miles away. How I envied the lads, flak and all.

Just as dawn was breaking, I came to the edge of the forest. I desperately needed water but although I was hungry it didn't seem so important. I could see a road some way off but no sign of habitation. So I decided to try and find a stream or a cattle trough if they used them in Germany. I skirted round the outskirts of the forest and joy of joys came across a small stream, but the water didn't look too good, but needs must. I cupped my hands and scooped up a mouthfull, it didn't taste too bad so I drank quite a drop and rinsed my face, and soaked my poor blistered feet. What a relief. I slipped back into the wood and curled up in a concealed hollow, falling sound asleep. I woke up to find it was early evening once again. Food was the most important thing on my mind, I had to soon find something even a swede or turnip would help.

The water hadn't had any adverse effect on me so I sampled some more, and feeling refreshed I felt the need to take to the highroad as soon as it got dark, I wasn't making much progress through the forests so I crossed a couple of fields and scrambled through the hedge, gaining access to the road where all seemed quiet. I was hoping to come across a sign-post so I could place my whereabouts. I quickened my pace and was making good progress when, as I rounded a corner, I came across a village. What to do? Go through it or skirt round it? I took the safe way and skirted round it. It took much longer than I thought as I came across many hazards not expected, like ditches, barbed wire and dogs barking their heads off.



I finally found my way back to the road and continued on my way. I did come across a sign post, but wasn't able to do anything in the dark. I had to dodge off the road a couple of times as headlights suddenly appeared coming my way. I must have covered some 10 or 15 miles and was pleased I had taken to the road. I then came to the outskirts of another village. After my last experience earlier on, I decided to chance it and go straight through.

All seemed quiet in the early hours of the morning. About half way through the village the air raid siren suddenly started to wail. I decided to run, before anyone appeared on the streets. I was suddenly confronted by a large man in some sort of uniform who had a rifle in his hands. He called out something and pointed his gun at me. So yours truly had no alternative but to stop. Before the blinking of an eye there were dozens of men surrounding me.

I was bundled off to the local police station where I was searched and all my possessions were removed and put into a bag. I couldn't understand a word they were saying. I was given a hunk of very hard dry brown bread and a cup of coffee, which despite its awful taste I struggled through! I was in need of food whatever it tasted like. Round about 8am, a young lad was sent in to see me, probably because he spoke a smattering of English. Well, he tried to get me to answer his questions, but I didn't, so he thought I was some other national. It was rather amusing to see how rattled he became, giving up in disgust in the end. About an hour later a German dressed in a pilot's uniform came in with a guard and led me away to a small truck standing outside. He said to me in broken English, "For you the war is over."

We drove through the outskirts of Stuttgart and I could see what a mess the RAF had created, buildings were in various stages of collapse, and fires were still burning. I was taken to an airfield and I finished up in the guard house. After they took my name, rank and number, I was taken to another room, and surprise surprise - there was the rest of the crew, all except the tail gunner Ben. He had been found, but had broken his ankle on landing, so he had been taken to a local hospital. While we were there a bunch of Luftwaffe air crew came in and were quite chatty, offering us cigarettes and wishing us well, much to the annoyance of our guard, who roused them out.

We were taken to the railway station where we had to sit on a bench under the watchful eyes of the guards. We were soon suffering the attention of the general public who were shouting and spitting at us, until the guards told them to clear off. We began to wonder how much longer we had to sit there in full view of the locals, who might get out of hand. I could understand their anger as the bombing had been devastating, and no doubt the loss of life had been high. Fortunately the train came in and we were bundled into a compartment and the guards locked the door. I understood that we were being taken to a centre for interrogation - Dulag Luft.



There, we were split up and taken into a room where we were interrogated. After we refused to give more than name, rank and number, which we repeated time and time again, we were dragged off to solitary confinement. This was a small cell with nothing more than a bare board for a seat or bed, plus a bucket. The light in the high ceiling was blazing away night and day. Food consisted of nothing more than their idea of bread, which was dark brown, hard as nails, and tasted like sawdust, and there was water.

I was kept there for three days, then interrogated again. They again requested details of where you were based, what aircraft you were flying, what special equipment was on board etc. He then said "OK, we know all these facts, you were born in London, joined the RAF in 1942, you were based at Faldingworth etc." So it made me wonder why they went to such lengths, when they already knew so much. I was sent back with the rest of the crew, who had also undergone the same treatment.

From Dulag Luft we were sent by train, which was jam packed to the limit. I unfortunately didn't get a seat, except on the corridor floor, which was hell on earth as you were constantly being trodden on day and night. The weather was also very hot, so we were stripped to the waist, and the floor became very hard. I can't remember how long we were on the train, but it was several days.

We finally arrived and had to walk about two miles to reach the camp, Bankau, near the Polish border. As we approached, we could see the lads lining up and calling out to see if they could see anybody they knew. We were welcomed by the camp leader, who was an Australian. So began a new life, for us totally different to any we've had before. But that's another story.....