

road; the Bell Hotel in Norwich on an incredibly thick, foggy night, twenty pilots asleep on the floor, furniture, stairs, blankets provided by the owner, unable to move until nearly dawn; to the theatre to see the "Girl the Lord Chancellor Banned", Bader and 242 occupy a box almost on the stage, sister Squadron across the way, gorgeous creature goes through her act to a background of ruderies from both Squadrons; the bar at the Bell Hotel and being told outrageously funny stories by Basil Radford and Roland Culver and being addressed as "Canada", a memorable evening; a dining-in night, rare in wartime, for Air Marshall Trafford Leigh-Mallory at Dixford, a new All New Zealand Squadron of the RAF commanded by Dusky Clouston, a Czech Squadron and 242; after dinner a rugger game with chesterfield cushions; in the entrance area "Daddy" Woodhall, the Station C.O., also a New Zealander, playing a Maori war chant on his accordion, Dusky doing a "Hoaka" and pulling the most amazing faces while slapping himself on knees and chest; a huge pile of pilots on the floor, Bader bent a leg and was escorted to bed; Leigh-Mallory, tunic off, tie cut off immediately below the knot, saturated with beer; dawn readiness; hospital at Ely — fat graft on leg to ease the pain of cut nerve ends; the marvellous Ward Sister "Stevy"; stinking, filthy weather; down below 100 feet on kipper patrols — sorry for the fishermen; Norm Campbell, St. Thomas, Ont., lost to a JU88 — his body washed up at Great Yarmouth, three weeks later; 257 Squadron and Stanford Tuck with us at Martlesham Heath; what a bastard he is; painted green the prominent testicles of Tuck's foul Bull Terrier; the dog jet propelled when paint removed with Turpentine by Tuck's batman; Christmas at Martlesham — marvelous bash; posted to Central Flying School, on rest?

P.O.W. No. 43257

"Everytime I moved, those damned machine guns opened up in my direction." Sgt. John Dales had just landed in the swamp beside a lake some 10 miles north of Berlin. His parachute had become tangled and he landed so hard he went past his waist in mud and gumbo. If he'd landed on hard ground he knows it would have been broken legs or worse. It was very dark so he decided to quit struggling and hoped the machine guns would quit. He could hear the "plop" as the bullets hit the water near by, and their recocheting into space with a whine. Then he heard a couple of men talking, but couldn't see anything. His eyes hurt terribly and his face felt all scraped. He decided to lay in the muck quietly, and see what developed.

It was about 1:30 a.m. on Sept. 1, 1943, and they had taken off from Chedburgh, Suffolk Airfield several hours earlier in their Sterling Bomber. This was their third operation after doing several shorter trips on mine laying. John



P/O Dales.

had joined No. 214 Sqdn. over a month previously, as Tail Gunner, after arriving from Canada in Dec. /42. He'd come off the farm just outside Sperling, Manitoba.

They had a load of incendiaries on board and had just dropped them over Berlin at under 12,000 feet — much too low for a target like the capital at anytime. Something wasn't going right, but all of a sudden there was a violent jar. John was sitting by his guns at the ready. There was an explosion right in front of him and he couldn't see, but he felt broken glass from his gun-sight all over him. The intercom was dead. He tried to look into the fuselage and saw a glimmer of flames up front and then felt a blast of heat. Ball out, raced through his mind. But the rear exit of the Sterling was very small — especially with your bulky flying suit and a parachute on your back. You had to go through sideways. (Some designer wasn't thinking about the poor Air Gunner getting out alive. He was supposed to go into the fuselage and go out the escape hatch there.) John undid his parachute, but left the straps done up. He put it in front of him, and eased out of the escape hatch. The wind tore at the chute, but he held on. One foot got caught in the hydraulics, but he wrenched free and fell out the exit holding on to the parachute. He knew the aircraft was going down fast so pulled the ripcord ring and the chute opened. But the straps tightened with a snap and hit his jaw and cheeks, but almost immediately he hit the marsh.

John lay there and wondered about the rest of the crew. He was the only Canadian, but like most crews, all got along great. Later he found out from the mid upper Gunner and the Bomb Almer that the rest of the crew had been killed. A shell had hit the nose section and had likely killed

That's me!



Stirling bomber, No. 7 Sqdn. in 1941.

the Pilot, Flight Engineer, and Navigator. The wireless op was back helping the mid upper Gunner and Bomb Aimer dump out some "window" to confuse the radar, when they were hit. But the W.O.P. didn't have his chute on and tried to go up front through the flames to get it. He didn't make it! The other two jumped immediately.

John tried to focus his eyes on his surroundings and at the glimmer of dawn, saw a railway bridge nearby, but no guards could be seen or heard. He slowly edged his way out of the marsh and made it to the bridge. There had to be a better place to hide than submerged in water and mud! Hide by day and walk by night was the standard motto for those on the loose. And you stole what you could from gardens. But by the fourth day, John was practically blind, so decided to surrender.

"I was taken to Dalug Luft I and put in a room for a few hours with an American Colonel who was badly burned from the waist up. There was a terrible smell coming from his dressings; said John. I asked him why he hadn't jumped before he got so badly burned."

"I had to stay at the controls as long as possible to make sure my boys had time to jump" replied the Colonel.

"The Colonel was hungry, but especially thirsty," continued John. He said there was some cabbage water nearby, so I felt around for it. I got hold of it and then had to find the Colonel's mouth through all the bandages. He drank it all by spoonfuls. Then I was taken for interrogation. It didn't take long because they knew my squadron and the whole crew. Three of us with serious eye problems, Jim Buggs from Brighton, Fred Peters from Rhodesia, and myself were taken by German covered jeep through Berlin to another camp. The guard stopped at a Military Canteen and ordered Tea and Beans for the four of us. Just as we were going to eat, in comes a German Soldier, looks at us and says something before leaving. Our guard tells us to get the hell out of there fast, as the

soldier was getting some of his friends to come in and either beat us up or kill us. We were back in the jeep, again hungry, and finally arrived at Klouster Hiennar at Bad Salva on the Polish corridor where 300 blind P.O.W. were kept. There were all nationalities there and all under treatment by two British Army Doctors. Major Charters was the eye specialist and Captain Harris the surgeon. This was a convent with 9 Nuns, but the Doctors also had some trained Orderlies. It's believed all were at Dunkirk in 1940 and chose to surrender to look after the many badly wounded in the 51st Division. They had been very busy ever since."

"My appointment with Dr. Charters started with a solution put into my eyes and it sure hurt, but felt good. My eyes had been paining so bad the last few days — it couldn't be any worse. Then he started probing in my eyes. I heard him say "Bloody hell" many times as for an hour he dug out chunks of glass and dropped them into a jar."

"You might see a little in the future with a little bit of luck, commented Dr. Charters. But be here every morning at 9 A.M. for eye drops and bandages."

"For 3 weeks I went everyday, says John, but couldn't see hardly a shadow. But the next 3 weeks it improved and I began to see better every day. We had a party for a bunch of guys who were going home in the first draft of P.O.W., who were totally unfit for future Military Service. Then three of us left for VIB P.O.W. Camp where I joined a work party. I helped deliver Soup Buckets all over camp. Taffy was with me and he sure hated the Germans. We delivered soup to the guards regularly and Taffy dally urinated in their soup. If he had ever been caught, I'm sure he would have been shot on the spot. One of our guys was caught stealing. He was picked up and thrown head first into the Camp Latrine and kept there for awhile, almost swimming in that filth. I think he learned his lesson!

In May /44 some of us went to a new P.O.W.

camp — No. 357, and it gradually filled up. We had some real pros in camp. There was an expert in every field — even a pick pocket. We needed batteries for our secret camp radio so our pick pocket said he'd try. During a "sheep count" and search he managed to take the guard's flashlight, take out the batteries, and put the flashlight back on the guard's belt. You had to have better eyes than mine to see that done!

Next we needed a German uniform for our next escape try. One day a guard and his dog went into one of the barrack blocks. Someone teased the dog, another grabs the guard from behind and blindfolds him, while in seconds his uniform is taken off and he's dressed up as a P.O.W. and put outside again. Several minutes later he's back with more guards looking for his uniform. "What uniform is that? comments one P.O.W. "It must have been another barrack block," says another. "Are you sure he's sober." They searched everywhere but never found the uniform.

March 15/45 we began our forced march to keep away from the Russians. About 75 of us started out on a ration train. We were stopped at a siding beside another train one day when the guards locked our boxcars and ran madly off. Down swoops a Mustang on a Strafing run and followed by a Typhoon firing rockets. After it was over the guards returned and opened the boxcars. There were bullet holes through them all and the station and engine were wrecked. Only one guy was slightly wounded. But the train next to us wasn't even hit — and it was a loaded ammunition train!

We continued our march by foot, carrying what we could and reached the Oder River in a couple days. There was no bridge, but we salvaged an old barge and made it across.

On the way over a FW190 strafed us, but again we were so lucky with only one hurt.

We started again — the 75 of us with 3 guards and almost ran into a panzer division, camouflaged in a small tree area. We skirted them and came to a small town. A Mosquito Fighter flew by, but its engines were coughing. It hit a Church Steeple dead on with an engine on each side and they buried themselves in the nearby cemetery. We didn't see any pilot or navigator!

Next morning we hit an Autobahn highway and started walking west. On a curve, suddenly seven big fuel trucks appeared as a convoy going in the opposite direction. Then just as fast, 3 Typhoons screamed down from the sky on a strafing run. Someone yelled to hit the ditch on the high side of the curve, and so we ran like hell. I could see the convoy guards and drivers doing the same. They ran for specially made man size holes built along many main roads just for these emergencies. Again we were lucky with no one hit — but the tankers were a complete write off. We feared our own fighter bombers more all the time as they attacked anything that moved —

and we knew there were hundreds of groups like ours on the roads heading for the west. We were in an area northwest of Berlin towards Hamburg by the end of April.

Next day a Tiffie Pilot joined us. He was a Canadian like most of the Tiffie Pilots were and said they hadn't been too careful about what they attacked. He was scared as hell all of the time — watching the sky for his fellow fighters to attack us. I didn't think much of his kind — especially being on the receiving end of their indiscriminate attacks. Everyone knew the war was about over.

We were nearly starving and had to pick grass and dandelions to mix into a stew. One night we saw a barn which would be shelter for the night. I also spotted several mounds of potatoes in a field off the road. The guards took off for the house as soon as we were settled, so I sneaked out to the field to one of those potato storages. I dug the dirt away and then a layer of straw and there were good potatoes beneath. This was how they kept their potatoes for seed. I filled up an extra shirt I'd brought and carried about 60 pounds back to the barn. In the yard one of the guards shone his flashlight around. I dropped the potatoes and ran for the barn door. The next thing I knew I was in the loft with a bloody nose and two black eyes. There was a post across the barn door that I hadn't seen and had run into it and was knocked out. The boys knew I was out getting potatoes so were waiting. They got me upstairs, and also rescued the potatoes before the guards arrived. The guards were still in charge, but were getting more lax and a bit friendly. They too knew the end was near. We divided up the potatoes and everyone felt better.

The next farm we stayed at had a dairy herd downstairs. That night a few of us ex farmers plus one of the guards were doing a little milking on the side. Did it ever taste good!

Next day we continued on. Towards evening we saw a big seed drill in a field with six horses in front — all shot several days before. That would have been good food at the time! The farmer was real upset but said we could stay there. In the night a couple guys came to me and said they heard a pig grunting somewhere near. We searched but couldn't find anything. Finally we narrowed it down by noise and found two pigs down a well which was well camouflaged. We confronted the farmer next morning as we knew he had kept those pigs for himself instead of registering them with the authorities. He agreed to give us one if we didn't tell anyone. We could have taken both, but still believed in fair play. The big pig gave each of us a couple pounds of real meat — hair and all.

May 3rd we were at Kline Zarinton all day near a German travelling administration unit of some 3,000 men and women fully equipped even with their own generator. Next day a British jeep arrives and tells us to arm ourselves from a school down the road. I got a submachine gun

and in no time the admin. group surrendered to us. They were sent down the road towards Luneburg by foot after being disarmed. It was 45 miles west. For a couple of weeks I had been chumming with Jock, a graduate of Sterling University in Scotland. He spoke perfect German whereas mine was only passable. We decided to go to Luneburg so went out to the main road to "borrow" a vehicle. Along comes a German van with 6 army teenagers in it. We disarmed them and sent five on their way. One was in the back with a broken leg and the bone sticking out so we kept him. We headed out and shortly found a U.S. Engineering outfit so drove in. The guard asked a few questions and said he'd like to have the Tooke I was wearing as a souvenir. I traded him for a bottle of Dutch gin and were directed to the Cookhouse. White bread and yellow cheese; we hadn't seen any for nearly two years — and to be washed down with Gin was something.

Next we had to have some diesel fuel for our beautiful covered van. The fuel dump was next door and they even gave us an extra drum. Our German soldier was still with us, but the guard told us to take him back a few miles to a place called Buchan. When we got there it was crowded with wounded — all German army and there were plenty of dead bodies all over the area. The German Doctor said he couldn't take any more and didn't even want to see our casualty. We persuaded him, with my submachine gun, to come out to the van and look at him but still he said no. I said, "he's one of yours and likely about a 17-year-old kid." One more no and I told him I'd shoot him right there. An orderly was called and we waited for an hour until the leg was set. Imagine that from a Doctor. Life was sure cheap!

We started for Luneburg with the idea of driving all the way to the English Channel. We didn't know what was happening, but just wanted to get to England out of all this destruction and death. By this time we were both quite high from the Gin. We had to cross the Elbe River by Pontoon bridge, so pulled in behind a big truck. Half way across the bridge began to sink. The truck ahead was going up with his rear wheels in a foot of water. We were going down with our front wheels in water. One of the guards gave us hell "you read that big sign back there. It said keep your spacing — 80 feet between each vehicle." Hell, we never saw any sign. Finally made Luneburg and a M.P. looked us over with our submachine guns and gave directions. Six more M.P.'s gave us directions and we got nowhere in the compound. Finally an officer came over and explained they would take the van and we were to be airlifted back to Britain. I landed back at Croydon, then to Bournemouth for dehousing, new kits and pay parade, then leave. But in the drill hall in Bournemouth a Senior officer came in to address a couple thousand of us. "Form up in lines" he yelled.

"No, we won't," we yelled back and we didn't.

Frank May from Whytewold, Man., Bev Howard of Hagersville, Ont. and I took off for a week's leave at the Lancaster Hotel in London. We raised hell for a few days and then Frank said he had a blind date with a cousin of his girl friend's for me. I was trying to recover from too much alcohol, food and late nights so said no. He insisted, so finally I went along grudgingly — and met Joyce. We dated steady after that. In fact we missed six drafts going home by having one of the three in Bournemouth to yell our names out while on parade. Finally we were told we'd all be discharged in England instead of Canada, so had to leave in August /45."

John kept writing to Joyce and went over after harvest in 1946. Frank May almost went too, but backed out at the last moment. He should have gone, as things didn't work out here for him and he died unnecessarily 15 years ago. John worked for the winter in London and they were married on May 29/47. It took some convincing to get Joyce's mother to accept the fact that Joyce wasn't going exactly to the wilds of Canada.

Today, John and Joyce farm just a mile north of Sperling and only a half hour from Winnipeg. Their two children are only a few miles away. John says, "I couldn't have got a better wife anywhere." And I think the feeling is mutual. His eyes still bother him, but he gets no medical pension. "I'm alive, I've done what I wanted, I can see, I've a beautiful wife and family and I haven't worried about a pension," he reasons.

He still has scars between his eyes from running into that cross port on that barn door in Germany.

John has been four years Legion Zone Commander and taken the position seriously by trying to help veterans and their dependants.

"LUCKY THIRTEEN"

"We had just dropped our flares over Dessau, Germany and had come around for our bombing run at 1,500 feet. It was dark, but we could see our target clearly as our bombs went into the middle of a Junkers Aircraft Factory. We could also see those deadly 20 M.M. Multiple Quick Firing Cannon firing at nearly point blank range — and then we were hit! The gas tanks on the starboard side were ruptured, but we didn't catch fire. I also knew we wouldn't be getting home this night."

P/O Bert Clark of Brandon, Manitoba was flying a Hampden Bomber in No. 44 Sqdn. from Waddington, Lincs. and this was Aug. 13, 1940. This was the middle of the Battle of Britain and Bomber Command was trying to do their part to disrupt German war production.

P/O Clark had joined the R.A.F. with seventeen other Canadians on March 13/39. He had graduated as a pilot when war broke out and after a three month Navigation course was posted to No. 44 Sqdn.