

## **From Crash to Camp**

*The following is Philip 'Tim' Fussey's recollection of some of his experiences following the plane crash on 13/14<sup>th</sup> Sept 1942 and his time in the POW camp.*

*It's thought Tim wrote this following a visit to his home in Yorkshire in October 1997 by Sue and Len Oldfield. Sue's father was Ron Dicks, a friend and colleague of my father's who was sadly killed on the night of 13/14 September 1942 in the Stirling R9166.*

Lying on the river bank – not completely compos mentis, I took stock of myself. It was dark – a warm dry September morning. I had my flying helmet on minus head phones and mike – I was wearing my R.A.F. Battledress (but no flying gear except a submariner's sweater – wonderfully warm) and I'd got no boots. I was cluttered up with the parachute and harness. I got out of the harness and tried again. The river bank was sandy with a concrete wall to keep the river in its place. Behind me – as the sky lightened – I could see houses with gardens coming down to the river. I was about five feet from the sheer drop into the river. Two yards further over and I would have drowned. It dawned on me that I'd better move. It was getting lighter and I heard an aircraft overhead. I suddenly realised I was not going to get back to the U.K. I have felt lonely (really lonely) twice in my life – once when I gave Hilary away at her wedding - walking down the aisle with H on my arm and nodding and grinning at acquaintances and very soon "who giveth etc" and I was shoved the back and became, in a trice, a very back seater. The other time was on the river bank.

I buried the parachute and harness (sandy soil) and decided to get lost. No boots, no skin on my hands and the day getting lighter. There was a smallish tree - only one - a few yards away. I climbed it – about 10 feet up there was a fork in the branches and I rested a moment. By now I realised I had a broken rib or two and I glanced down. Just under me was a civilian in flannels and sports jacket – "Ox blood for young bloods" was the fashionable colour, and he had a 12 bore shot gun in the crook of his arm. I realised I was about to get both barrels straight up the tree. I passed out – fortunately wedged in the fork – when I came round he'd gone and it was daylight. Somebody was shouting "Zurück! Zurück!" A bloke was backing a horse and cart up to the river to dump rubbish. My heart leapt – "Zurück" means "Back"....I had my message; I was going to get back (in a few weeks I thought!)

I had an escape kit – on investigation it proved to be a map of Germany printed on a handkerchief (The whole of Germany on about 8" x 8") a bar of concentrated chocolate, (ugh!) and a rubber football inner to hold water. This one had a tear in it.

I stayed up the tree all day – I thought about the crew..... The next night I investigated some of the garden sheds. None were locked. I found an empty Hock bottle – a water tap and eventually (joy of joy) a pair of Wellington

boots (cut down to sort of slippers) They were a bit small but manna from heaven.

I had come to the conclusion that the river was the Weser and (Hell and Damnation) I was on the wrong side of it – I daren't look for a bridge – there would be sentries. I found a canoe paddle (but no canoe) which gave me the idea. A garden gate would make a raft. Up the tree again next day. Darkness and it's the paddle and me. Gate also. I launched my raft, knelt in the approved Canadian canoe fashion and pushed off with the paddle. At once the raft shot off at the rate of knots. I eventually got to the other side (about 2 miles down stream I should think) and got entangled in some bushes. I scrambled up – gate and paddle went onwards to the North Sea.

This bank was similar to the other. Houses with gardens and sheds. I got into a shed and went to sleep. I slept too long. About 2 in the afternoon I awoke to hear somebody just outside. He came in and it was an obvious (by his clothes) bargee. In the mixture of English, French and German we talked. He wasn't perturbed in any way – he was a big thick set fellow. Eventually I got it across to him that if he got me on his boat and down the river to Delfzijl (in Holland) I'd see he got a reward (paid by the British Government) in Reichmarks. He knew about the scheme so it wasn't too hard to convince him. My heart leapt up. I felt I was almost home then his wife came looking for him – saw me and started on about "Englischer Terror Flieger". He got her calmed down somewhat and shoved her outside – came back and let me know much as he liked the idea of Reichmarks he daren't help me. His wife's brother had been killed in an air raid (Hamburg I think) I was absolutely shattered – 5 minutes earlier I was practically home. Without thinking I reached down for my Hock bottle – half full of water – and hit him on the temple side of his head – frustration made me almost berserk and I really hit him – there was blood and broken glass and he just went down in a heap, as I was hitting him (only once) I hoped he was out – otherwise I reckoned he would kill me. I didn't wait, I was out through the window (not the door which faced the houses) and across some waste ground and then across a field and into a ditch under a hedge. I couldn't believe I ran so fast with my gammy foot. At the other side of the hedge/ditch there seemed to be a lot of boy scouts fooling around. They weren't boy scouts – they were Hitler Jugend. Soon several came pushing and shoving each other and one fell onto the ditch and saw me and yelled. The troop leader came along and about 20/30 of these youths with him. They fetched a civilian policeman – about 65 I should say and he worried me. He was calm and collected - he came on a bicycle, gave it to one of the Hitler Jugend to hold and said – in English "Hello – for you the war is over. Are you hurt?" I said "Yes, and in pain, I need a Doctor" He was obviously a WW1 veteran and didn't flap or panic at all. "Are you hurt?" "Yes" "Can you walk?" "No" "Use my bicycle" I felt excited at that – if I was on the bike I was away...but he simply took the chain off and draped it on the handlebars. Then he took his lüger pistol out, bent the flap of his holster back, cocked it and replaced it, helped me onto the bike, held the frame under the saddle and away we went.

He took me to the tram on a road nearby – turned everybody off it, put me and the bike on it and the three of us were at the Police station before I knew it. From there to a barracks – full of parachutists and I was handed over to an English speaking young officer who got me some food, let me use the loo and then locked me in a room with a soldier who never spoke but made great play with his rifle. I went to sleep in a chair. The young officer came back after several hours and said he enjoyed meeting English Servicemen and he'd like to entertain me for the evening. He fetched 2 other Germans – one a paratrooper and the other a glider pilot. He cooked eggs and bacon (last eggs I tasted for 2 years 9 months) and we settled down to natter. I immediately suspected this was a covert interrogation – but no – he said it was a friendly gesture – just chatter – and it was. I thanked him for the meal and the evening and he took me to a room – decent bed, bathroom and loo and bade me farewell. He asked me if I met 3 different people (can't remember their names) would I give them his greetings. (I met only one later and his experience had been similar to mine. He thought the bloke was looking after himself in case Hitler lost.) There was an armed guard outside the room.

Next morning out in a Volkswagen. (It wouldn't start and I made great play with that!) To the railway station. My escort was about 17 and scared stiff. He spoke English and never stopped fingering his Luger pistol (worried me!) Eventually we got to Frankfurt-am-Main – Slow journey and a long wait at F-a-M until a car arrived and I was bundled into it. All the time I kept asking for a Doctor and going on about my injuries. The invariable answer was "Soon".

Journey's end was Oberursel – Dulag Luft, a transit camp used for interrogation. Stripped and Searched. (My RAF watch went, but my gold cuff links were overlooked as my shirt sleeves were rolled up and the searcher missed `em)

The cell was just big enough to hold a bed and a chamber pot. The door had a Judas window. The window was barred (with frosted glass) Next day an interrogator arrived. I gave him my RAF number, Rank and Name and wouldn't answer his questions. Out he went, back next day – same again – The third day he said "You are stupid – no one knows except me that you are here. We can do what we like with you. Think about it. I will see you when I have had my 3 weeks leave." 21 days in solitary, food shoved through a hatch in the door – (food! thin soup, potatoes and bread.) The only break was a daily trip to the washroom/latrine to empty the chamber pot and use a loo. On one visit (in the loo) a voice greeted me from the next loo cubicle in English. He was Czech (I met him later) and he said "Don't eat all your rations and then if they get rough with you, you'll pass out. They don't waste effort on an unconscious man." Crickey! At the end of the three weeks my interrogator turned up again. He greeted me with my number, rank and name (which I'd given him) squadron number, aircraft type and indenty letter, aerodrome, my father's name and home address. The only thing he got wrong (I hoped) he said my mother was "deceased." There was a gap of several days from the last raid on Bremen and my capture – no flights in

between. I learned later though that they thought I could have been parachuted in "as a civvy agent"

I was turned out of my cell into an exercise yard with quite a lot of other prisoners and soon after we were bumped onto a train. Interminable journey to Sagan (Stalag Luft 111) East of Berlin in Silesia (almost Poland) I had thought quite a lot about what had happened to the rest of the crew. I was pretty sure the rear gunner should have got out – where was he? Cartmell had the worst chance, I thought and if I got blown out why not all of 'em? I never really knew. Later the Red Cross asked for information – I still thought someone or other (or all) could be loose and even living a new life under cover of an assumed identity. This did happen on occasions.

At Sagan (Stalag Luft 111 East Camp – a standing camp for aircrew no. 3) It was like old home week. In through the gates, crowds of P's of W known as Kriegies and due to my year as an instructor I knew quite a few. I realised this was not a welcome, more a sorting out of newcomers to make sure the Germans (Goons from now on) weren't trying to push one of their people in under cover. (There was one who was an Egyptian – he lasted half a day before the S(enior) B(ritish) O(fficer) instructed the Abwehr to get him out while he was in one piece.

I was billeted in Hut 63 Room 12. There were 5 Czechs, 1 Norwegian and me. I was lucky, only 7 of us. The Czechs could speak English (and about half a dozen other languages.) The Norwegian wouldn't speak English (but learning) so our common language was French. I remembered to say "Lentement s'il vous plait" when French was on – when Norwegian wasn't present we spoke English. I found then (and later on) that the Czechs were the salt of the earth – wonderful people, and the Norwegians (more about one of them later) were a close second. The French and Belgians were definitely at the bottom of the league table. Robert Maxwell (he of dodgy financial tendencies) said that as a publisher (Pergamon Press) he would get out a book of French War Heroes. It would have blank pages.

The food (German supplied) was scarcely adequate but with Red Cross parcels it wasn't too bad. The Red Cross designed the parcels to be one per person per week. We usually got 2 parcels for 12 people. It wasn't the Cross's fault – the Goons, the Swiss and all sorts of odds and sods had a go at them before they were delivered. The numbers of kriegies kept growing – there were about 990 men - all officers - in East Camp – North Camp which was larger had more and out of that lot there was always someone who could do anything or knew about anything; forging documents, making pick locks, translating pinched documents (and replacing them) - literally anything. People had jobs (before they enlisted) which I'd no idea about. Do you know what a Kleig lighting engineer does? No, and I didn't. There was a (self-confessed) Pimp, several Barristers, several Farmers, 2 works Chemists (who could make bootleg alcohol using potato peelings and a stirrup pump) and the expert forger was a Bank Manager. There were several teachers but only one Headmaster (me!)

At Oflag XX1B (Szubin in Poland) an Irishman figured he could cut the wire in a particular place as it was a 'blind spot' between two Goon boxes (Sentry Towers) A group of us were moved there from S.L.111 – trouble was the wire and the sentries. The barbed wire was hardened steel battle wire with 2½cm spikes – not ordinary farmer's barbed wire. It was strung along a 10 foot high fence with another 10' fence 4 feet away parallel to it and the space in between was filled with extended coils of battle wire. On the camp side of this was a sandy space about 4-5 metres wide, raked over each day, with a low post and rail about 18 inches high. If anyone stepped over this low rail, a sentry in the goon box would open up with a machine gun. No warning, no shouting, just immediate gun fire. If the sentry didn't shoot at once he was sent off to the Russian front. Another problem was the would-be escapee had no wire cutters. A Canadian prisoner was a metallurgist in civvy street and said if he had two lengths of iron about a foot long he could do something with it. Someone else had the idea of getting the longer arm of a door hinge – a 'T' hinge with one long arm and a shorter one. Someone else had a bit of hacksaw blade and suitable hinges were found (on 2 separate doors.) A cabinet maker removed the screws. The hinge was shortened and one screw hole was left on the shortened arm. Hinge was replaced and where the missing long arm had been was replaced with moulded rye bread coloured with soot and sand. It looked OK and the door still opened and shut – a commercial artist/model maker saw to the deception. The metallurgist got the end of each arm red hot and bashed a hole through with a 6 inch nail (Stove in the cookhouse provided the fire – a stone was the hammer.) So he now had two lengths of iron each with a hole about ¾" from one end. Put the nail back in the hole and there was a cutter – except it wouldn't have cut a match stick. Someone "borrowed" a file from a visiting Polish workman and returned it to him an hour later plus two or three cigarettes. That had sharpened the short cutting edges. The metallurgist melted some German margarine (ugh!) in a tin lid, got the heat just right in the cookhouse stove and tempered the short cutting edges. That was where his expertise came in. He tried it on a fragment of battle wire found lying around, and hey presto! it worked easily. A rugby match was arranged on a sandy patch away from the Irishman's "pitch" and on a signal a fight was to break out and spread rapidly to the spectators – a lot of shouting and hullabaloo and plenty of argument and so on. At the proper time the match took place, the fight likewise, the Irishman rolled over the sandy space, cut the wire of both fences, out and into the forest which surrounded the camp. He threw the cutter (in 3 separate bits) in three different places and that was that. He got quite a long way but was caught in a check on paperwork. The goons never found out how he could cut the wire. All this has taken a lot of tedious explanation but it was a small example of what went on. Forging papers and forging metal under very primitive conditions.

Making a radio was no real problem. There was a civilian physicist/scientist who had the bad luck to be in a plane while testing some equipment. Some of the crew were killed – he wasn't – and he assumed the identity of the dead air observer. (He was in RAF uniform and he got into the A/O's battledress tunic 'cos it had a flying badge on it) One or two people thought he was a bit vague on navigation but he explained he'd had a crack on the head when

they crashed. Later his pilot turned up and he was vouched for (The pilot and I knew each other from flying school.) The civilian boffin soon designed a radio and set out concocting parts for it but the stumbling block was radio valves. Before we go on to that – the boffin had to write to the real wife of the deceased whom he was impersonating. That was taken care of because a group were writing home in code – all organised beforehand in England - Val had a visit from Major Somebody who told her that all letters and cards from me would have a “tick symbol” on them. If she got one that hadn’t, she was to send it to him at some address in London and she wasn’t to mention it to anyone. She wondered what the devil I was up to. So you see it would be known what had really happened. I pitied the bloke who had to sort all this out with the wife. (She came up trumps and wrote him wonderful letters – I wonder if they ever met after the war...) Back to the radio valves. A pal of mine was given the job of subverting a guard. He was a German speaker. He picked his “victim”/“accomplice” and set to work. Chatted to the guard, offered him a cigarette then gave him some soap for his wife – real soap, not German ersatz and so on, after several weeks he asked the guard to bring him a “drop of schnapps” and he’d give him some cigarettes. He got the schnapps (strictly forbidden) then he said he wanted a P6 (or whatever it was) radio valve. The goon jibbed at that but when he was told that his English friend had developed a conscience he got one. He didn’t fancy a firing squad. He got several valves (to specification) and the radio worked. No loud speaker – ear phones. It was built into the bottom of a zinc bucket with a watertight false bottom and the space about had tea leaves and cooking rubbish in it. The radio people worked various radio stations as well as London so we knew what was happening before the Germans did. A story about the radio – the Dutch freedom radio was one reliable source, so a Dutchman used to do instantaneous translations and a stenograph took it down. He got ‘flu and lost his voice – another Dutchman (in civilian life a “remittance man” from the Dutch east Indies and a really professional confidence trickster) He was in the same hut as me and I got the job of getting him (after curfew and when we were locked in) to where the radio was that night. We got there all right did the job and set off back. We had a bit of trouble and were lying low until the ground patrol moved and I asked him why when the girl announcer read the news (I had borrowed an earphone) he jumped a bit. I thought it might be hearing a Dutch girl’s voice “No” he said “it was my wife, I knew her voice” I was stunned into silence thinking how I’d have felt if it had been Val. Eventually I said “no wonder you reacted – you did well to do the translation” “It didn’t bother me after the surprise - when I get back I’m going to divorce the bitch” He did too, and invited me to his second wedding some years later. I never went.

Still on the subject of the radio – we were suddenly told we were going to Oflag XX1B (men) Szubin in Poland and an English pilot called Jeep (he was middle sized and compact with a mop of blond hair – hence the name) and we were told we’d got to get this radio through to the new camp. We rigged up a trolley and put our possessions on it – including the radio in a false bottom of the trolley and set off. We were all marched off in a straggly line to the gate, into a hut and searched. (I had a long – 30” – saw blade round my waist under my belt holding up my trousers – as well as the radio) They

didn't find the saw but they whipped the trolley to one side and went to work on it. We realised we'd had it – The Jeep said (we'd rehearsed all this) "I'm having a heart attack!" and fell back on me. I grabbed him and carried him – like a bride over the threshold of her new home – and through the other door into the waiting ranks who'd been searched – put him down at once – he went one way and I another – swapped my greatcoat with somebody for a khaki one – grabbed some guy's spectacles, shoved my cap on a bare head and melted into the ranks. Somebody shoved a half smoked cigarette into my mouth and I tried to look as if I'd been there for the last quarter of an hour. (The Jeep had done something similar but yards away from me) By then two guards tumbled through the door waving guns and yelling. Immediately the kriegies (P's of W) started yelling and making rude noises. Ten minutes of chaos before the goons packed it up and marched us off to the station. (The radio was recovered the same night. The Jeep and I had to contribute 100 cigarettes a piece to the bribe.) We sorted out the spectacles, my cap and swapped great coat later on.

The Jeep and I, much later, we'd been brought back to Stalag Luft 111, were given the job of sorting out an escape problem. When new batches of prisoners arrived they were interrogated by the (British) security organisation and a pattern emerged that quite a number had been handled by a clandestine escape route from Germany through Holland and into France, but they had all come to grief near Amiens and they'd been collared. The Jeep and I were told to find out how, where and why; we'd a list of names and we interviewed 'em all. It amazed us how unobservant the average person was but we had to keep at it. We eventually found that they all had been left somewhere near Amiens (at different places) but had been picked up by a man who spoke good English, was called "The Captain" and sometimes had a girl with him. He used a car and took 'em to a flat above a shop in Amiens for the night. Next day they went off by car and somewhere the police stopped the car and took the POWs off leaving the car and the English Captain. The descriptions we got:-

The E.C. Tall – short – well built – fat – blond – very dark – had a limp.

The Girl "Gee she was purty" sums it up (that was from a Canadian professional base ball pitcher)

The Car Blue – red – dark – black – small – medium – 2 doors – 4 doors – sunshine roof – soft top – Peugeot – Renault – VW – Merc – Fiat – Alfa.

The shop under the flat "well it was just a shop"

Which street was it in "no idea"

Eventually we interviewed an ex London taxi driver who was now a radio operator. He learned French and had a good knowledge of German (been to night school – thought the languages would help in his taxi job) We got good descriptions of the English Captain, the girl and the car - a Topolino (micky mouse) Fiat, dark grey. He knew the street name and the shop was a radio dealer. The English Captain spoke English fluently – the girl didn't talk much. (The taxi driver hadn't let on that he understood French and German) They'd given him a drink and left him in the flat. He saw a radio and tried to work it buy no joy. He took the back off and found a loaded lüger pistol inside. He

put the back on again and began to wonder...a radio that wouldn't work, over a radio shop?

When the English Captain and girl returned they gave him a blanket, some bread and a hot drink of ersatz coffee, showed him the loo and wash basin and left him. Next morning he was lent a razor and then off in the car. The car was stopped south of Amiens by the French Police. The English Captain talked French. There was a civilian with them who spoke German and English and that was that.

We congratulated him on his observation and thanked him and, as an afterthought, I said "you were suspicious of the business – was there anything out of the way with the English Captain? Had he a finger missing or anything at all like that which would pick him out?" The Londoner thought and then said "No he looked perfectly ordinary. Nothing he couldn't alter like dying his hair or growing whiskers." He got up to go, turned at the door and said "There was one thing the girl couldn't alter – she was pregnant. You can't miss that – I have three kids of my own" We had struck gold.

All was reported back ending "Request liquidation of English Captain." It was done soon afterwards. A long time later I found out how. Two men were put ashore from a submarine – a Norwegian and a Pole – they went to Amiens, found the shop and the house/shop opposite was for sale and empty. (They'd been told that.) They stole a Panzer Faust (anti-tank weapon, German version of the Bazooka like a globe of high explosive on a metal tube.) The HE was rocket fired. They watched, identified the pregnant girl, the English Captain and the grey Fiat, then, when the street was pretty deserted and the English Captain and girl got in the Fiat, they fired the Panzer Faust; apparently it disintegrated the car (not surprising Panzer Faust would demolish armour plate) and the English Captain and girl as well as bringing down the wireless shop and flat. The Norwegian and Pole didn't hang around – out of the back and away (previously reconnoitred) on two bicycles (already marked down.) They met the submarine as planned and were in London shortly afterwards.

Soon after the enquiry the Jeep surprised everybody who knew him by letting himself be persuaded to play the part of a girl in a play the drama society were putting on. He took to wearing a beret to hide his blonde hair getting longer, and tottered around the camp in high heeled shoes supplied by one of the German censorines (girls who were multi-lingual and censored the in/out mail)...we'll leave him rehearsing for a moment..

Once a month we were allowed a hot shower in the German barrack section of the camp. Counted out of the gate, marched (?) (rather straggled) across the compound into the showers, undress and left clothes and towel off to one side, had a shower and returned. The windows were open and the guards fully clothed so they waited outside the steamy shower area. Back to the Jeep. He played his part – was very good walked and talked "à la merveille" (he had 3 different shoe changes incidentally) and was suitably upholstered and clothed. We then learned his purpose in taking the "girl" part – he was



going "over the wire" dressed as a woman using the hot showers as his take off point. Came the day (I was of the party) and a rowdy lot we were. The Jeep had his female gear wrapped in his towel. Handbag with papers, money, make-up and mirror, spare pair of stockings, a razor and hat-sort of beret affair worn sideways and a pair of "sensible" shoes – sort of strap over and a Cuban heel. Going to the showers he wore rope soled sandals, shorts and a short shirt. These were bungled up in his towel which I wrapped in my towel to bring 'em out. On previous visits he had spotted a partition behind which was a lot of old buckets and brushes and such like – nobody seemed to disturb them. The rowdy element were fooling around, filling the place with steam and generally making the 2 guards glad to stay outside. The Jeep disappeared behind the partition, gave me his clobber to bring back. We wished him luck and left him. The rowdy element did their stuff, pushing and shoving and not keeping still so that the guards couldn't get a proper count – gave it up and we rushed off to the compound gate. The guards ambled after us. The gate sentry shouted to the guards who shouted back – the rowdies did a good job singing and so on so that whatever was shouted between guards and gatemen was assumed to be all clear – the gate was opened to put us back in the compound – no count 'cos we stampeded through and melted into the nearest huts and out the other end.

The Jeep or rather Fraulein Jeep got organised and slipped out across the German compound – just after the censorines left, timed it right to get to the station and away. His German (language) was pretty good. He got quite a way when he had to change trains – not only trains, but stations – he was heading for Switzerland. He walked off and he knew he had to cross a bridge over some river or canal. There was a sentry at the apex of the bridge who tried to – as the Jeep said – "get fresh with me". The sentry tried to kiss him and put a hand up his skirt. Jeep apparently gave him a smart left to the stomach and a quick right to the jaw. The sentry staggered to the parapet and fell over in the water. Jeep kept his cool and sauntered on his way. He met two soldiers (one a sergeant) who were very solicitous and insisted on taking him (her) to some command post to make a complaint. End of story.

Escape attempts were going on perpetually. Some ingenious, some silly, some tragic and one successful. The Wooden Horse was successful. I'd sooner tell you about that than write about it.