

Douglas Wilmott Waters CPM

I was born in Dover, Kent on 22nd October 1920 and at that time we were living in Castle Avenue. At the age of 6 I went to a Convent, which was handy it being situated at the end of Castle Ave. I was late going to school due to some illness. However the Nuns did teach me to read. On my 8th birthday I went to the junior school of the Dover County School now known as Dover Grammar School. My first teacher was Miss Rookwood. She was a very well-known character in Dover a wonderful teacher. However she made me, as was common in those days, change from a left-handed writer into a right handed writer as a result I did suffer a stutter.

In 1930 we moved to Pencester Road which is in the center of Dover and we lived there for the next 4 years. In 1932 our school moved into a brand new building built on Whinless Down which meant my brothers had a walk of about a mile. I suppose I could consider myself an average pupil. It was a grammar school where we were screened and I was in the B stream. We had three streams A,B, and C. However I did manage when I was 12 years old to get a prize for making the best endeavors in the junior school.

My Father decided that he would like a country life so in the early thirties he bought a field of about 4 -5 acres in the village of Whitfield. He had a house built and on the land put in chicken houses and pigsties.



The house at Whitfield

In due course we ended up with about 400 chickens, three sows and a boar plus their progeny, two dogs and five ducks. That's when I became interested in farming. From the age of 13 -16 my brothers and I cycled to school a distance of about 4 miles. Lunch we always had at school. It was good and cost in those days 9d a meal i.e. 3/6d a week or in our present money about 16 p.

When coming up to the age of 16 I decided that I would like to go farming, after the usual discussion with the powers that be the Headmaster of the school, my father and others it was considered to be in my interest that I leave school and work on a farm prior to attending an Agricultural College. So in January 1937 I started work on a farm in Tunstall, nr. Sittingbourne at a weekly wage of 15/9 per week. I worked there for about 9 months and then entered the Kent Farm Institute on a year's general agricultural course to be followed a year later by a course in Commercial Fruit growing. I passed each course and received two certificates, which disappeared years ago. On my summer vacation in 1938 I worked on Elliots Farm in Penshurst as a Hop measurer earning 10 shillings a day, a fortune in those days.

After finishing the fruit course I was offered a job with the Ashdown and General Fruit Company in Horsted Keynes, Sussex. The company had about 1200 acres and grew apples, plums, raspberries, blackcurrants, cultivated blackberries etc. and had on their land as well as cold stores a jam factory. I was employed primarily as a nurseryman running their fruit nursery, bringing on young trees and plants. I joined the company in June 1939 and war broke out in September that year but I carried on working in fact I was in what was known as a reserved occupation. I clearly recall the sight of the barrage balloons going up around London the day war was declared.

Christmas week 1939 I went home on a week's holiday and during that week decided I would do my bit and join up. I went to the Army Recruiting office in Dover as I knew the recruiting sergeant -major, he had a son at my school. He asked me how old I was, I said I was just 19 whereupon I was told that as I was under 20 I could only join as a regular.

The next day I went by bus to Canterbury to the R.A.F. recruiting office and was told there were vacancies for three grades only - butchers, service police and wireless operators. I chose the latter and on the 9th January 1940 was ordered to report to Uxbridge in London where I was kited out.

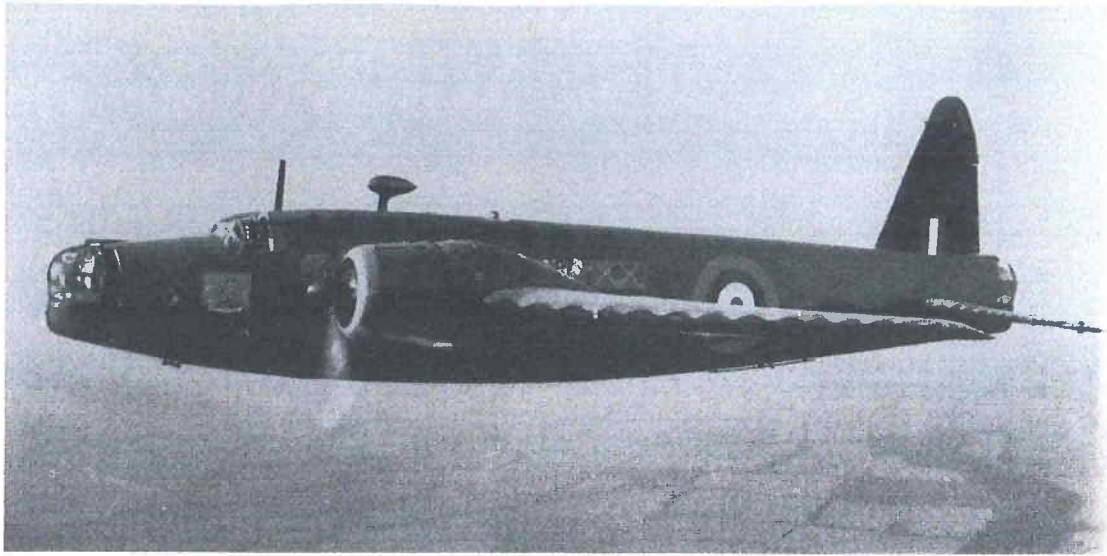
With other recruits and then we were all sent off by train to Morecombe where for the next 4 weeks we carried out our basic drills and induction into the R.A.F. We lived in seaside boarding houses.

But it was a time of a very cold winter and I will never forget doing P.T. and drill in the ice and snow on the sea front.

On leaving Morecombe I was posted to Cosford not doing an awful lot until in April that year I received my posting to No2 Wireless School at Yatesbury, Wiltshire for a 5months course. This I completed successfully passing out, as we had to send and receive the month's course in radio work. Our course consisted of handling radio equipment, using the Aldis Lamp and the use of flags. Our passing out exam consisted of sending and receiving the Morse code. At 21 words per minute, and using the Aldis lamp, at 9 words per minute. On completion of the radio course I was posted to Stormy Down Aerodrome, Portcawl Wales for a months gunnery course. This consisted of learning to assemble and strip the Vickers and Browning .303 machine guns and then air to air, flying in Fairy Battles and Whitleys and practicing air to air firing at drogues flown by another aircraft. I passed out as a slightly above average gunner. On completion of this course in November 1940 I was posted to the O.T.U. Harwell [Operational Training Unit] for a months course.



Prior to being posted to an operational Squadron. This course included a milk run over enemy territory. My trip was over the Brest peninsula. No bombs were dropped only at this time leaflets for the French population. The trip was uneventful. On completion of this course we were crewed up and posted to our Squadrons in 3 Group, flying Wellingtons 1C's.



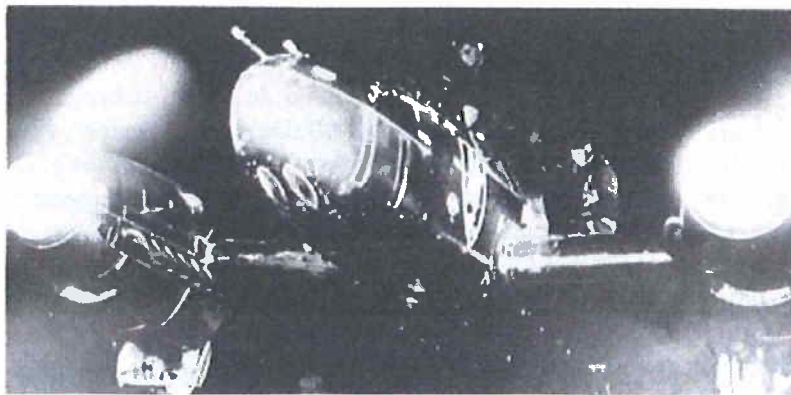
Wellington Mk.1C. My aircraft was N2746 BU-M manufactured by V-A Chester and delivered July/August 1940

I was posted to 214 Squadron in Stradishall, Suffolk on the 9th January 1941 having in the meantime a week's leave with the family in Gravesend. This was the last time I was to see my father and before I left I had one beer with him in a pub down town. On arrival at Stradishall I was crewed up with Jack Tomlinson the other WOP/ AG and the rest of the crew were all sergeants, Mick Elder being the Captain, he having already completed 14 operational trips as a second pilot.

During January and February that year very little operational flying was done due to continuous bad weather, we only did one trip to Dusseldorf. By March the weather was improving and on the 12th March we were briefed to bomb the Folke-Wolf aircraft factory in Bremen. I can remember seeing the works clearly as they were beside a river and it was a full moon. We returned that night safely. The following day we were briefed to go to Hamburg.

We took off at about 8.30 p.m. on a clear moonlight night, crossed the coast and as usual tested our guns, carried on and crossed the Dutch coast. Before long we ran into heavy flak having been coned by searchlights. I in the front turret fired down at the master searchlight and suddenly all the lights went out.

Within a short time whether seconds or minutes I cannot remember how long, the aircraft gave a sudden lurch and commenced to go down. Mick Elder, the Captain gave the order to prepare to bail out. I came out of the front turret and clipped on my chute, and stood by the front hatch. Surrounding the hatch were Tommy Tomkinson the other wo/ag, Sol Glazer the Navigator and the second pilot Vic Bagley. Mick turned and pointed towards the open hatch with his gloved hand indicating that we were to jump. I went first and as I left the plane I saw that one engine was on fire and the plane was heading straight towards the ground.



Messerschmitt 110 G9+HM Leewarden Aerodrome piloted by Ofw. Paul Gildner of NJG 1 Nightfighter squadron

Almost immediately I noticed I was heading into some trees. I was unable to avoid them, as I was much too low and thereupon crashed into them, coming to rest and hanging about 12 feet from the ground. At the same time as I came to rest I heard the sound of a tremendous explosion as the plane hit the ground and blew up.



Wreckage of my Wellington at Jipsinghuizen being inspected by Ofw. Gildner and Uffz. R Muller

I managed to climb up into the tree and release myself and duly fell to the ground. I saw a crowd of six to eight Dutch spectators from a nearby farmhouse to where I was taken.

Within minutes arrived a posse of Dutch police on bicycles from a border police station, which was only a couple of hundred yards up the road. In fact I could see the lights of the border post from where I landed. The village nearby was Jipsinghuizen.

I was arrested and eventually handed over to a German Luftwaffe escort which arrived at about 3 a.m. and was driven to Leewarden aerodrome, which was an aerodrome from where the 110 night-fighter that shot us down was stationed. I was told by the Germans at the aerodrome that the rear-gunner Danny had been killed by the night-fighter and that Tommy the other wop/ag had jumped but was much too low and had been killed on impact with the ground. We had jumped out at about 400 feet. At about 10 a.m. after having a meal of ham and black bread I was driven across Holland to Amsterdam and lodged for the night in a cell in the old prison there.



The graves of George Cedric Daniel, Sgt. Alexander Graeme Elder, Victor Laurens Bagley, Sgt Sol Glazer, Sgt. John La Basse Tomkinson in Groningen Cemetary which I visited 22 May 1999. These are maintained by local school children

The next day having met another R A F. bod, who had been shot down the night before me, and was also a sole survivor of his crew, we were taken under escort of two guards to the Station at Amsterdam, and taken on an express train to Frankfurt, and duly taken to the airforce Interrogation center Dulag Luft and after three days of questioning entered the main camp.

And after enough prisoners had arrived we were then transported by train to a permanent camp Stalag Luft 1 at Barth in North Germany.



Stalag Luft 1 25.12.1941

Jackson FAA, Ron Akerman, Trevor Aldwick, Bobby Harwood FAA, myself, Reggie Cullen, George Bessell RFM



*Stalag Luft 1 16.1.1942
George Bessell, ?, Wilkinson, myself, Ron Akerman, Hamilton, Jackson
Trevor Alderwick, Reggie Cullen, Tuby Dickson, Bobby Harwood*



Occupants of Room 23 Stalag Luft 1 28.12.1941

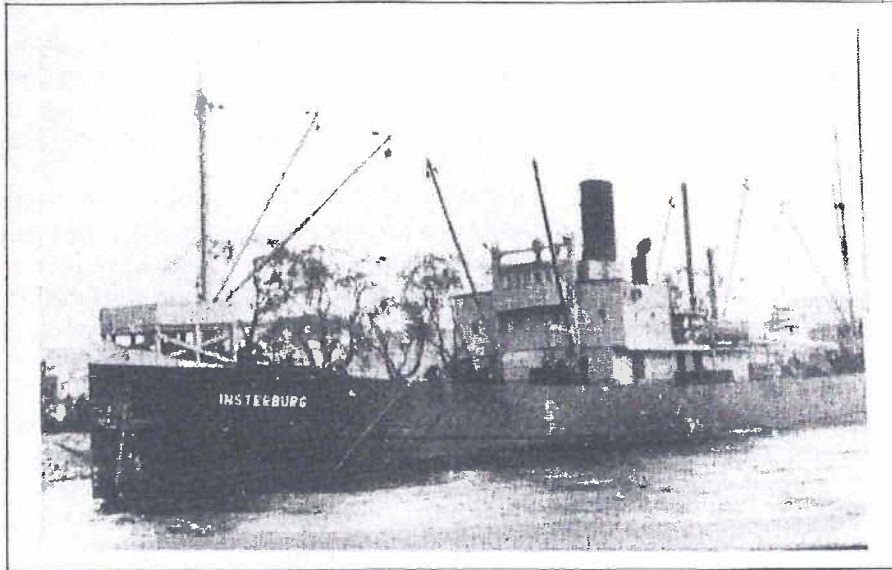
*?, ?, Ron Akerman, Ramon, ?, George Bessell, Wilkie (Wilkinson), Tuby Dickson, myself (lining them up)
Ham (Hamilton), ?, Reggie Cullen, Jackson, ?, ?*

I was there for a year and then transferred to Stalag Luft III, the camp from which the Great Escape was later to take place .

It was at this camp that I met up with Ron Akerman and Reg Cullen, and we remained together for the next 4 years, although within a year Reg Brown joined us. He had been shot down flying in a Lysander dropping arms to the defenders of Calais, who were trying to hold up the advance by the Germans on Dunkirk. Unfortunately Reg was never to make to back to the U.K. being killed by friendly fire when we were shot up by our own planes during the last week of the war..

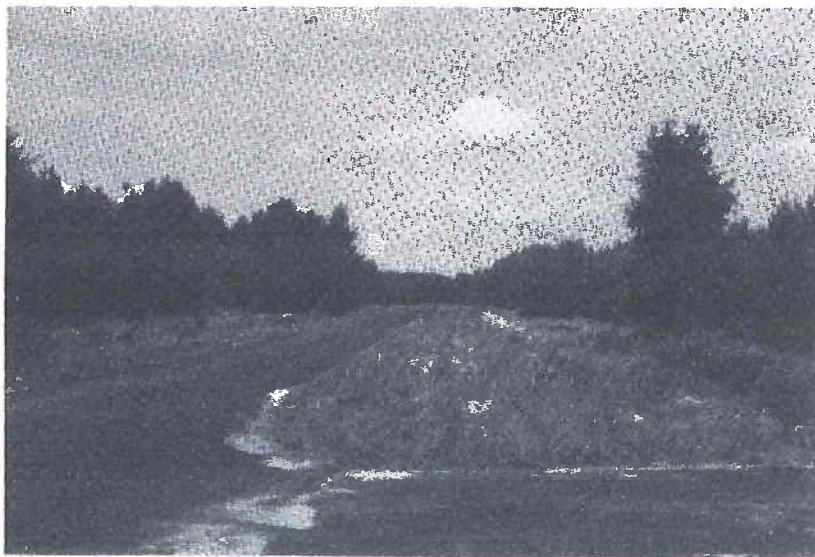
As the Russians advanced from the East we were moved on 14 July 1944 from Hydekrug on the Baltic coast by cattle truck to Memel. There we were herded into the hold of *The Insterburg* a 1919 freighter for a three day journey of hell to Swinemunde. On arrival an air raid took place. The battlecruisers

Leipzig and Prinz Eugen moored in the harbour opened fire adding to the deafening noise. During the journey in the Insterburg the toilet was a bucket passed down into the hold by rope which when pulled up the rolling of the boat ensured its contents split over the Kriegies (POWs) below. It was high Summer – the journey was hell, not to mention the ever present threat of mines or submarines. There would be no escape if the ship was sunk.



The Insterburg built 1919 sunk 3 May 1945

From there we had a train journey of a day and night, again with no food or sanitation before arriving about 2kms from the camp at Tyshow. It was a day I won't forget. It was 19 July 1944, the day of the attempted assassination of Hitler. We were then marched up this road. The guards provoked by their commander then started to prod and stab us with their bayonets forcing us to run. The dogs were also set on us. The guard with me, Ron & Reg said he had been a POW in the last war and did not agree with this and we'd be alright if we stayed together and do not try to escape. The guards were then withdrawn. It was then we noticed machine guns in the woods on the side of the road. Passing the word down the line that no one was to break and run. There were also cameras to record the 'escaping' POWs who would then have been shot attempting to escape. This event called 'The Run' became a recognised war atrocity. We then had to enter a clearing, there was no camp and guards had been positioned either side of the entrance to again attack us as we entered. The German commander who instigated it was later executed by the Russians.



Site of "The Run"

We left here in February 1945 for a march lasting three months with nothing to eat but what we could scavenge from the countryside, potatoes etc. It was during the last week of the war that the barns we were in were attacked by Typhoon fighters of the RAF. Reg who was sleeping next to me in a barn died

