

7 SQDN

Mr. Herbert William Graham (W.O. A.G. P.F.F.)

Aged 45

~~████████████████████~~
Ilford Essex.

Thursday August the 12th 1943. I'm on my 42nd. OP. Target Italy time 2358 hours. This is my third trip to Italy. Except for a little flack which was red hot on crossing the French coast the trip has been very quiet. It won't be long before we are looking down on a beautiful sight, the Alps, when I yell out "what is wrong with the engines, I have no power back here?". (I'm rear gunner.) For no apparent reason our two port engines of our Lancaster are out of action, height 1700 feet, we are falling fast. Within seconds our bomb doors are opened and bombs away safely. We gained a little height but soon lost that, we were returning to base. After about a quarter of an hour's struggle our skipper said "Sorry chaps, just can't keep the crate up, prepare to abandon ship." Our navigator named a *revez vous*, then came the order. Abandon Ship. I waved my hand and out jumped one gunner, as I was preparing to leave I reported to the skipper, "Eric away I am just going, Good Luck," I sat on edge of step, rip cord in hand, heart in mouth, (I had never made a jump before) head down and away I went. We were below the safe height for our type of parachutes to operate properly. It seemed hours before my chute opened but what a relief when it did. I laughed to myself. No need to return this chute for not opening. One's brain acts very strangely at times like these. What am I being lowered to? forget that and I think of my past life in the R.A.F.

(2)

After a rough six-weeks training I was sent to Southampton on balloons. We were in a park on top of a hill. One Saturday afternoon I was on guard, the army lads had just started a soccer match, when without any warning down showered the bombs. Lucky for me most shrapnel stuck into the side of the hill. I fell to the ground with shrapnel falling all around me. I phoned H.Q. but they did not believe me, about five minutes later many officers were on the spot, laugh, I forget I had a rifle on my shoulder and saluted by raising my hand to my cap. You should have seen ^{THEIR} his face. About six-^{WEEKS} weeks later I was on my way to Scotland, Xmas day we had a Turkey dinner, after dinner we slept it off, at 1700 hours a voice pips up, "Cold turkey for the first few," a mad dash for tea where we find bread and cheese, we nearly killed the lad. At my O.T.U. we were photo bombing near Bristol when Jerrie decided to make a raid. It seemed all the guns were aimed at us, we soon made off. My first station was equipped with Sterlings, new to me. On landing after my first trip I opened the door and placed the ladder out, before I could tighten it down P.O. Smith decided to get out, he did flat on his face. On a training trip over the wash we were doing drouge firing, the rear gunner at this time was the front gunner, he was having trouble with the guns, when suddenly there was bags of excitement, I wasn't plugged in so didn't know what was going on, when the instructor tapped me on the shoulder and pointed to the starboard side, I got up and looked out there was a DO.17 bomber with all guns blazing. The poor skipper didn't know what was happening as the gunner was giving him just the opposite directions. We were lucky, I was the only one hit a chunk of shrapnel in my boot. One day we were going down to the sports ground when one

(3) of the lads looked up and said, "What are they," ~~they were~~ Spits
Blenheim and Wellingtons? ^{"NO THEY WERE 109-88 + 0017"} Jerrie kites ~~ix~~ all belonging to the R.A.F.
On my first op. we were after the Bismark. On board we had a naval
officer, In the Bay of Biscay we came across a big fleet, one of the boys
said, "Let them have it." The naval officer nearly done his nut, it was
a neutral fleet on exercises. On a trip to the Rhur we ran into a
thunderstorm, what an experience that was, one didn't know what was
happening. The weather was one of our biggest enemies. On three trips
we only had ten minutes flying time left, we were lucky, we made it
many lads didn't. On one trip we had cloud up to 1900 feet but when
we got to the target it was clear. This was once the ~~we~~ met boys didn't
boob. I saw my mate shot down over the drome on there last trip before
their rest period. In the early days we had to fly for about half an
hour through enemy search lights, this was a terrifying experience. On
my thirteenth OP. we fell into a fighter trap on the way home, without
any warning up came a Master beam, bang on us, ^{DOZENS CAUGHT US} we were blinded. I put
my night glasses down then up, they were hopeless, all I could see was
lights, next two flicks, I whipped my guns into that area, just then
bullets whizzed past my ears singeing the leather on my helmet and
jamming my turret, by this time the skipper had the nose down to make
speed for home. On a trip over Williams Haven we had two F.W.190's
following us in, the engineer an ex-gunner said "Let me do the controlling"
just when they were about to make the kill we turned into them. It was
a laugh to see them pass us. The flack was a pretty thing to see
struggling up to us, November the fifth had nothing on Jerries flack.
We use to test our guns over the North sea, unknown to us our skipper
had left the second pilot in charge while he went to the W.C. We asked
if we may test our guns, on opening up the skipper pips up, "Whats

(4)

going on?" in the excitement his shirttail dropped into the disinfectant, did we laugh. On my last Italian target we saw a bomber get a direct hit and blow up, we followed unknown to us with our bomb bay in flames. The wireless operator had reported to the skipper of a strong smell of smoke. "Raf up its the flack," said the skipper. Our engineer looking through inspection hole shouts "Our bomb bay ~~is~~ is alright." As we were over target we let our bombs go, luck was with us, they all left the racks. The second pilot shouts, "Home James." Another safe journey. Back to earth on Friday the 13th August 1945, where I find I have landed safely in a tree, it was pitch dark. I released my parachute and decided to drop, how far was it? I had no idea but luck was with me, it was only a few inches to the ground. I left this spot very quick. After walking all night I came to a village and made my way to the church to find out where I was, but I was spotted before I got there. A farmer asked me in for breakfast, coffee and dry bread very acceptable. The farmer's wife wanted to sell me to the Jerries. (I understand a little French) The farmer showed me on my map where I was and I made a quick exit. I planned a ten day trip to Switzerland. At 1000 hours I heard that Jerrie had got three of the boys. After a full day's walking I came to a big town, as it was still light I decided to sleep till dark. I went through about 2130 hours. A group of youths followed me out of the town, one threw me a crust of bread, it wasn't long before more food was coming my way with a note from one of the boys' Aunts. "God bless you my lad, I will pray for you this night." They told me my mates were in the local hospital with leg injuries. They gave me a lot of information and then left. Walking on in the rain the bushes seem alive, I discover it is only cattle then a figure appears, it is a farmer, he just said bonjour and I passed on. Passing

(5)

a small village in the morning people gaped at me with open mouths and eyes popping. My main trouble was lack of water. After thirty-six hours I was picked up and handed to the underground. They told me Jerrie was after me but instead of the dogs following me it seemed I was following them. My first meal was smashing, but a ~~nix~~ ~~xxx~~ wash and a shave was equally enjoyable, then a nice soft bed and s-l-e-e-p. Within a day I was on my way. Later I heard the four people who helped me were interned. Then I was taken to a hideout which was kept a great secret, not even the head of the movement in that ~~xx~~ area knew. A maid who came in for six hours a day ^{didn't} even knew I was there, she was expecting a baby by a Jerrie. I ~~x~~ stayed here for many months. My window looked on to a collaborators garden. ~~I~~ I was told some horrying stories of torture to young and old. At noon one day Jerrie sealed off the village, I thought he was looking for me but no, one of Jerries spies living with the underground had been shot by a cabinet maker it was he they were after. He got away but only just in time. Next day he was able to clear the explosives from his hotel. While the Jerries were moving troops to the coast I made my get away. On the same train sitting opposite me was a German Officer, we faced each other for six hours, a person i n the same compartment asked me ~~what~~ what station we were at, ignoring the voice I left the compartment. While in a restaurant I almost gave the game away by eating with my knife and fork. Walking along a river bank I fell over a Jerries legs, he was sprawled out on the grass with a girl. We were following a guide in a busy shopping center, she was only five feet tall, in the crowed we lost her but she soon found us. I was in a clothing shop being fitted for a jacket when in walked Jerrie, another near miss. On the train I rubbed shoulders with many of them. Four of us were in a luggage van for two hours with

6) two German Air Force Officers, what a quite trip that was. After twenty-six hours walking we came to a spot where we rested. I handed out wakie-wakie tablets, which I had saved for such an emergency. These tablets had the reverse affect on one chap who went into a deep sleep and snored loudly. On starting off we spotted Jerries just above us, we made a dash for cover and down the opposite slope of the mountain. On crossing a swollen river we all stumbled, I thought my mate was going to drown, in the struggle to save him I ruptured myself and lost my shoes, which had been tied together and slung round my neck. For three hours I walked in stocking feet. My feet are still scared. (On arriving home my three year ~~xxx~~ old son seeing my feet exclaimed "Daddy has worn his feet out." We finally reached England after a month of hard travelling and narrowing escapes.

I have been unable to mention names and places as I must protect the many people who have helped me and to whom I owe so much.

My wife had been planning a treat for me, if and when I came home, what a laugh this turned out to be. We went to see, For Whom The Bell Tolls. I relived all my escape.

At. W. Graham