

61 Squadron Crashes at Home during My Time at Hemswell

- L4107 06.06.39. Stalled into sea off Leuchars after air-to-air practice, Tentsmuir Range. 3 killed. I was on the same course.
- L4114 14.06.39. Crashed on landing at Leuchars. P/O Porter was with the W/Op doing an air test. The undercarriage gave way or folded.
- P1170 14.10.39. Crashed on trying to land at Doncaster racecourse having to disperse for the night from Hemswell.
- L4111 07.03.40. Crash landed at Digby on return from operations, killing 4.
- P4349 08.06.40. Forced landing at King's Lynn due to petrol shortage and fog.
- P4339 13.06.40. Converged with Hampden L4138 at height of 20ft over Hemswell. Collided, wrecking both machines. 2 killed, 6 injured.
- P4337 30.06.40. Hit H/T cable at 15.55hrs. at Torksey, Lincs.

The Hampden Bomber

In his book Bomber Offensive, Sir Arthur Harris, writing of his feelings upon taking command of No 5 Group, Bomber Command on September 11th 1939 has the following to say of the Hampden:-

"For one thing the Group itself was equipped with an aeroplane which failed to meet many requirements of the normal specifications, especially with regard to the comfort of the crew. It appeared to have little to recommend it except a very reliable type of engine and the fact that this particular aeroplane had at least materialised in a hurry and was available in some numbers; most of the other types were still largely on paper. The crews made the best of it and, being strong and reliable, the aircraft did a sterling job."

Maximum bomb load 4 000lbs 870 miles at 172 mph at 15 000ft.
2 000lbs maximum range 1 990 miles.

144 Squadron Crashes at Home until July 1940

- L4136 20.04.39. Stalled in attempted forced landing and dived in at Sunk Island, Yorks. Killing one.
- L4218 02.06.39. Crashed on approach to Hemswell from 400ft in a cross wind at Caenby Corner (just down the Lincoln Road), killing three.
- L4122 03.07.39. Landed with undercarriage not firmly locked.
- L4130 24.08.39. Belly-landing at Hemswell.
- L4167 30.10.39. Struck ground in overshoot on Doncaster racecourse, injuring two.
- L4166 19.11.39. Hit fencing on landing at Doncaster.
- L4137 20.03.40. Dived in near Scunthorpe while on cross country exercise, killing three.
- L4143 22.04.40. Crashed at 14.15 hours near Kirton-in-Lindsey, injuring two.
- L4163 17.04.40. Struck house on edge of Hemswell airfield on take-off for operations. Four killed.
- L4135 27.05.40. Taxiing with a full bomb load when aircraft swung and broke its back. "A clumsy effort by a very ham fisted pilot... who has been suitably dealt with".
- P1164 11.06.40. Overshot Hemswell at 00.15 hours and ran through on return from operations.
- P4345 13.06.40. Struck balloon cable over Felixstowe docks at 02.35 while on operations. Four killed.



Airmens graves
Harpswell Church

REFLECTIONS

Sagan

The camp at Sagan, in Silesia, built in a clearing in the midst of pine trees had high double fences of barbed wire with rolls of it festooned between them; watch towers around the perimeter manned by men and machine guns with powerful searchlights mounted beside them, waiting for the night when they would spring to light, their beams searching the compound for any erring prisoner bold enough to step out of his hut. Around the perimeter, guards, with rifles slung on their shoulders, moved back and forth along their allotted span.

Inside the compound was built a series of long low huts, raised two or three feet above the ground on piles, so that searching guards could see beneath for embryo tunnels. Seismographs were buried at intervals along the perimeter wire so that any attempt to tunnel a way out of the camp would be recorded, usually in the form of vibrations by instruments in the Commandant's office. To further enforce the security the Germans had a team of men dressed in overalls, who moved around inside the compounds and through or under the huts day and night and hence were aptly named 'ferrets' by the inmates.

Some nights Alsatian dogs were let loose in the compound. On one occasion they caught up with one of the lads who was endeavouring to slip unnoticed from one barrack to another. To his embarrassment and consequent suffering he was bitten on the penis. At the next day's sick parade he was told by the Irish camp doctor that he had been most fortunate and that the ladies would prefer the slight irregularities he would be left with and that he now had a very good opening gambit to an intimate conversation.

Where Is George?

Probably the most daring and innovative of escapees of all times was a Sergeant Grimshaw – for the Germans in their turn sought him here, sought him there and at times they had to seek him everywhere. A fluent German speaker, so great was his ability and potential, that at one period a German unter-officer was detailed to come into camp daily, seek out George Grimshaw and then report back to the Commandant that he personally had made contact.

The goons, that is the guards who spent their days ferreting under the upraised barrack floors, wore a grey dungaree outfit. Grimshaw one day dressed up in a similar home made outfit, approached the main gate, showed a forged identity card and simply walked through, at the same time having the audacity to rebuke the gate-keeper for his slowness in responding to his demanded exit.

On another occasion when the goons were repairing the boundary lighting circuit he donned a set of black dungarees matching theirs for badges and style. Calmly and coolly at a distance from them he placed a ladder against the fence near to a sentry and entered into a conversation with the occupying guard. He fumbled some repairs, pretended to have finished the job, then placed his ladder on the opposite side of the fence and descended again on to the outside, for what proved to be another period of temporary freedom. When escapees were recaptured and brought back to camp, they were interviewed by the Commandant and sent to the ‘cooler’ where usually, after about fourteen days in solitary and on a restricted diet, they were allowed back into the main camp to the cheers and ribald remarks of the inmates.

Grimshaw’s final escape was towards the end of the war from a camp situated in Poland. He was never heard of again. Some said he had escaped for the purpose of setting up an organisation to help escapees. Many returning repatriates were asked for information about him by the British, but without success.

John Bristow – A Remarkable Kriegie

This Obituary was taken from the Daily Telegraph

John Bristow, who has died aged 74, kept thousands of Allied prisoners of war supplied with news through the wireless sets he improvised in various camps, where his service became famous as 'Radio Bristoff'. An airgunner and wireless operator in bombers, Bristow had been shot down over Denmark in 1940 and he spent the rest of the Second World War in Stalag Lufts I, III and VI. Two of his wireless sets – one disguised in a gramophone, the other in a mess tin – are now exhibited in the RAF Museum at Hendon. An airman friend, proficient in shorthand would also listen and prepare a bulletin for dissemination to other barracks.

A fair, curly-haired extrovert, 'Bris' Bristow employed some daring ruses to obtain bits and pieces for his clandestine sets – once, having gained entry to a camp commandant's office on some pretext, he arranged for a distraction while he filched crucial material from the telephone. He fashioned smoothing condensers from the contents of Red Cross parcels and the India paper of a bible, used crushed razor blades to make magnets and adapted toothpowder containers into earphones; and to obtain such components as he could not contrive, he built up excellent trading relations with camp guards. Bristow also fashioned a number of medical instruments, notably one to collapse the lung of a fellow prisoner suffering from tuberculosis.

An electrical engineer's son, John Frederick Howard Bristow was born at Camberwell, London, on August 14, 1915, and educated at a local church school. Having learnt his trade at his father's knee, young Bristow joined the RAF at the outbreak of war and by the summer of 1940 was a sergeant wireless operator and airgunner in an operational bomber squadron.

On August 13, at the height of the Battle of Britain, it was his misfortune to be crewed for a disastrous daylight raid on a Luftwaffe base at Aalborg in Denmark. Eleven out of twelve twin-engined Bristol Blenheim light bombers of No 82 Squadron were lost, along with most of their aircrew. Bristow bailed out and was the only survivor from his aircraft. He was briefly hidden by a Danish doctor. But, on learning that the Germans had threatened to shoot anyone harbouring airmen from the raid, he insisted on giving himself up next day – his 25th birthday.

His German captors reciprocated this sporting gesture by celebrating with a bottle of Schnapps before despatching Bristow to Stalag Luft I on the Baltic, where he soon devised the first of his makeshift wirelesses. In the spring of 1942 he was moved to Stalag Luft III at Sagan in Lower Silesia, to which he managed to smuggle his receiver in a concertina which, though missing some notes in the base register, still played fairly well.

By the middle of the next year Bristow had been moved again, to Stalag Luft VI at Heydekrug, where he struck up a relationship with a German corporal named Wagner. The guard supplied him with radio parts and warned him that the Germans knew there was a set in camp and had promised 14 days' leave for news of it. So Bristow made up a fake set and informed Wagner of its whereabouts, enabling him to win the promised leave. On his return, Wagner treacherously suggested a search of Bristow's hut, although the radio had been dismantled and its parts dispersed.

In 1944 he found himself in want of a valve for a transmitter and, knowing that there was in an amplifier supplied by the Swedish YMCA for the camp's theatre, he duly plotted to obtain it. The theatre was set on fire, and a time bomb planted to destroy the evidence of the raid on the sound system; Bristow left a record of I Don't Want To Set The World On Fire on the turntable.

Bristow was mentioned in despatches for his exploits and promoted to warrant officer. After the war he resumed the family business and continued to produce gadgets – he was especially proud of the solar heating system he devised for his swimming pool.

He is survived by his wife, Daphne, whom he married in 1945, and their two sons.

Cossacks Returned to Face Stalin's Death Squads

This is Based on an Article by John Keegan
Daily Telegraph September 23rd 1988

Allegations that the late Earl of Stockton, formerly Mr. Harold MacMillan was personally responsible for the disgraceful return of anti-Communist Russians to Stalin's execution squads at the end of the 1939-45 War were refuted yesterday by an independent committee of enquiry. The allegations were made by author Nikolai Tolstoy in his book 'The Minister and The Massacre' published in 1986.

In May 1945 hundreds of thousands of fugitives fleeing from the Red Army and Tito's partisans arrived in Austria across the Yugoslav border. Among them were groups of Cossacks who had been part of the German satellite forces.

Under the terms of the Yalta agreement signed by Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt in February 1945, all Russian nationals at the end of the war were to be repatriated to Russia as long as they had been Russian citizens on September 1st 1939.

The British Government recognised that large numbers would resist repatriation. Because it was anxious to secure the speedy repatriation of British Prisoners-of-War it resolved to implement the Yalta agreement without exceptions. Most of the 50 000 Cossacks were liable for repatriation under the agreement. The repatriation was carried out first by deception and when that failed, by force. Some committed suicide rather than return. All made it clear to the British soldiers involved, who were affronted by the operation, that they expected death on arrival.

Personal Reflection

This is one of the saddest episodes in the history of the British Government and the Army's actions during the Second World War. One must ask how many British POWs like myself were repatriated. The government at the time of signing the agreement would not know. Certainly our freedom was achieved only at the great sacrifice of others.