

25, Wisley Road,
West Side,

Clapham Common,
London. S.W. 11.

Wednesday January 7th

Dear Mr & Mrs Whitley,

Please accept my
sincere thanks for your Christmas present, it
was very kind of you indeed.

Frankly I don't know what to
write about because we have never met and
also because of Jimmy. I am frightened of
bringing back memories that are best left
alone. However deep down I know you will
forgive me if I mention Jimmy as I knew
him.

He was a fine fellow and
I am glad that it was my pleasure
to meet him, live with him and work
with him.

On that fateful night of

March 1944 we had our usual briefing, the target being Nuremberg. We took off at about 9.30 pm and everything was normal until we reached the enemy coast. First of all we had searchlights searching near us but we managed to evade them, later on Jimmy sighted a fighter against which we took the usual evasive action, he didn't attack however but went below us and stayed there. At this stage of the trip I went off the intercom system to listen to the midnight broadcast from base. Approximately two minutes later I felt a nasty bump, and, immediately went back to the intercom just in time to hear the mid upper gunner report that our port outer engine and wing were on fire. The skipper ordered us to put parachutes on and prepare to bail out. After clipping on my chute I opened the door immediately behind me and saw

Jimmy and George in the fuselage, both with their chutes on. After this the bomb-aimer reported that the bombs would not release (since I have learned from him that in a last desperate effort he managed to release them). I was standing in the Astro-dome at this time and actually watched the outboard motor and half the wing disappear, immediately the skipper ordered an emergency bale out adding that he could not hold her straight and level. The aircraft slid slowly over to port and started spinning to earth, we were all braced and could do nothing because of the tremendous amount of "G" exerted by the rate of descent. I passed into unconsciousness and so did the bomb-aimer and head lifter. I vaguely remember pulling the rip cord of my parachute but must have just begun to come

round properly when I hit the ground with an awful bump. After regaining my breath I found that I had part of the aircraft with me - the cockpit capsule. With an effort I managed to unfasten my harness and brace west and rid myself of most of the debris I had brought down with me. I tried to get up but found it was impossible. After laying for a couple of hours a couple of German soldiers found me and stayed with me until daybreak. Later an Officer arrived and tried to get information about the operation, our Squadron etc., but I made out I didn't understand him. Later still I was put into the sidecar of a motorcycle and given the roughest and most painful ride of my life. I was put on the floor of a small shed near to a bridge, later the bomb aimer and his upper were also brought in and it was then that

we discovered we were the only survivors.

That afternoon we were taken to Aachen and put in a P.O.W. hospital, the other two boys not being badly hurt were sent to a Stalag the following morning but I had to stay behind. The injuries I received were fractured spine, fractured left ankle, split spleen, a damaged left knee and plenty of cuts and bruises. I stayed in Aachen hospital until the night of April 14th when the R.A.F. attacked the marshalling yards near by, the hospital was hit and I was buried for several hours. I was then taken to Bonn and for the first time for several weeks met up with two English lads. I eventually left hospital at the end of June still quite unfit but nevertheless well well to occupy a bed in a German hospital. I was sent to the interrogation centre at Frankfurt and from there to

Stalag Luft 7 in Siberia and remained there until Jan 19th 1945. On this day we started to march toward Central Germany away from the advancing Russians, altogether we covered about 350 miles in a month, living only on what we could find and scrounge. I have no idea how I found the stamina to carry on, the marching became automatic after the first two days, in which we covered roughly 90 miles to enable us to cross the River Oder before the bridges were blown up. Eventually we arrived at Stalag 3A about 35 miles South ^{East} West of Berlin and there we stayed until liberated by the Russians on April 6th.

Our troubles still weren't over because the Russians insisted that we should fight to help them capture Berlin, however everybody refused so they left us without food and put armed

guards round the camp.

Four other hours and I escaped about a week later and made our way to the Americans at Bitterfeld a distance of roughly 80 miles.

The Americans flew us in Dakotas from Leipzig to Rheins, kitted us out with G.I. uniforms and then put us on board a Lancaster for England. I eventually arrived home on my 19th - only to learn that my father had died while I was away.

After six weeks repatriation leave I was sent to an M.R.U. at Cosford near Wolverhampton and whilst there met the girl whom I married a year ago last October 5th.

Two years ago today I had an operation on my spine and now have five vertebrae welded together with bone chips grafted from my hips.

At present I am in good health but dread the coming of the cold weather because it makes my back ache so much.

I was demobbed on Sept 12th 1946 and granted a 40% disability pension.

I returned to the same firm that I was with pre war and am now at their Head Office in Old Bond St.

Very briefly that is an account of what has happened to me since March 1944.

I am terribly sorry I haven't written to you earlier but I hated to think how a letter from me would have distressed you, therefore I decided that I would simply send you a calendar each year just to show that I remember you and also to thank you for giving me such a grand friend as Jimmy.

Would be glad to hear from you again sometime.

Yours Truly
Lakenty.