

The overall initial excitement experienced during the morning of our new found freedom was soon forgotten as our situation rapidly deteriorated for a time during the afternoon when retaliatory measures commenced with the nearby village being shelled by the Germans using multi-barrelled mortars. Additionally the Hospital was also straddled by this heavy mortar fire, and for those physically able, like myself, it was face down hugging the floor again. Luckily, the Hospital was not hit, but they were some very near misses during the bombardment.

Those of us able to ducked, and got as close to the floor as possible, especially when we heard the approaching whistle, and whine of each salvo of mortar shells, and their subsequent explosions. The poor unfortunates in traction, and other surgical cases had no option but to remain immobile in their beds, and hope for the best, naturally all the inmates were a more than a wee bit apprehensive at the turn about of the general situation. Later on in the afternoon when all seemed a lot quieter our medical officers decided, in conjunction with the Yanks, to evacuate the walking wounded to a safer place further behind the advance, using U.S. Army trucks. This arrangement was both speedily, and skilfully handled by the Yanks who, before we left Obermassfeld Hospital, informed us that the offending German mortar gun positions had been pinpointed, attacked, and put out of action by USAAF P51 Mustang aircraft. Everybody, especially the traction, and surgical cases confined to their beds, heaved a great sigh of relief, and a spontaneous huge cheer went up for the Yank fly-boys.

For the record our American liberators were units of the 11th Armoured Division, and the 26th Infantry Division, both being part of the U.S. Third Army commanded by General "Blood and Guts" Patton, a crack outfit, deservedly so after such a rapid advance through Germany from the River Rhine crossing.

I was one of the lucky lads to be evacuated, and clutching a Red Cross parcel box in which I had stashed my very few personal belongings, mostly cigarettes, I clambered happily aboard one of the trucks along with a number of other Kriegies who were all Army types.

A few miles behind the point of advance we arrived at the Thuringian village of OBERWEID, which at that time was the Divisional headquarters of the 11th Armoured Division, U.S. Third Army. The Yanks stationed there welcomed us with open arms, I did not expect such generous treatment as we ex-Kriegies experienced at Oberweid, the hospitality was really marvellous.

Although the time of our arrival was 1.30 am of the early morning our hosts had laid on an excellent meal which was on hand waiting for us when we arrived, I can only say it was magnificent following such an austere P.O.W. existence.

I and my companions were in residence at Oberweid for a total of five days, and, frankly, we looked after the premises as though the house had been our own, we could not have been fairer than that. I must say that these German villagers cannot have been in such dire straits as some of their city cousins because the basement of our temporary abode was well stocked with all manner of eatables, which were hanging temptingly from the low rafters, such as hams etc. It follows therefore that inevitably the temptation proved too great to ignore, and we could not help sampling some of the very choice items with which we were confronted, especially the hams. Spoils of war I think is the term that refers.

I was at last living a more civilized existence, having received tooth paste, and shaving materials from our American friends, I was now looking more like a smart airman should, despite my near bald head on which the hair was just about showing the first signs of growth.

Although I and the other ex-kriegies spent a carefree existence during the short stay at Oberweid eating and drinking with our Yank hosts, we had received strict orders not to venture very far from the H.Q. building, and our own houses because of the very frequent sniping incidents occurring around the outskirts of the village. Pockets of resistance were still very active in the area with groups of fanatical Hitler Youth, and "Werewolves" (Nazi guerrillas) being particularly conspicuous, consequently a curfew was in operation around the immediate area of the village, which was nine thirty pm.

After lunch we often joined the Yank soldiers in the building they used as a mess, to share a few drinks, and during a conversation with a G.I. I had got to know, he revealed the existence of a cigar factory situated on the outskirts of Oberweid. He followed up by asking me if I would like a box of cigars, naturally my answer was in the affirmative I thought they would make a nice present to take back home for my father. My G.I. friend got up, from his chair "there is no time like the present, lets go then", and off we went with my escort, of course, fully armed with his M.I. carbine at the ready. I must say I did not give a thought about the snipers in that area, but I did have a bodyguard. We duly arrived at the scene of the cigar factory without mishap, but when inside the building my G.I. pal, somewhat disconsolately

found that all the boxes of cigars had disappeared, in fact all the cigars had gone with the wind, the place was empty, totally and emphatically. My Yank friend, with a wry smile, informed me in his own inimitable way that it certainly looked as if the German civvies had looted what had remained of the entire stock of loose and boxed cigars, but told me not to worry, but just follow him. Unaware of his next ^{move} I was then mildly astonished when he forcibly entered the nearest house, and commenced to search the basement, sure enough the occupants ~~of~~ had a large wicker basket hidden down below which proved to be full to the brim with prime Deutscher cigars. Giving me a knowing wink my G.I. escort advised me to take as many as I required, which I proceeded to do without any second thoughts, at the same time helping myself to a small attachment case I found in the same basement room. With the German family standing idly by gaping, I busily crammed in as many cigars as I possibly could, without any conscience, and thus concluded my final foraging sortie on German soil.

While attending breakfast the following morning I learnt that all the surgical cases left behind at Obermassfeld P.O.W. Hospital had now left, they had been transported back to a base hospital. This party of about one hundred and fifty people included all the hospital staff, I felt really happy about that. A day or two later I and my fellow ex-kriegies, living it up in Oberweid, as guests of the U.S. Third Army, were informed by an officer of the 11th Divisional H.Q. that we walking recovery cases were at last going home. With a smile he revealed to me the great news that arrangements were being made to transport our ex-P.O.W. complement in ambulance trucks to an airfield which was near Frankfurt-am-Main, and from this air base we would be flown back to the U.K. . As far as he knew the operation would take place on either the following Sunday or Monday so we would have to stand by on the alert ^{during} those days. Dazed, but elated the good news quickly infiltrated our minds, and besides, feeling pretty good about life I was now, in a physical sense, well on the road to complete recovery. After several days in Oberweid as a guest of the U.S. Army I had regained some of the weight I had lost. Our hosts had been exemplary, and could not have done more for us, we had enjoyed an abundance of good things to eat such as eggs, fried chicken, pancakes, and plenty of "K" ration packs, these were really something, the G.I.'s standby. I even imbibed a several glasses of Champagne, the real stuff, and cognac too. Mindfully, I had to take it easy on the hard stuff on account of my ailment, but some of the other lads managed to achieve a state of near inebriation. There was no doubt that the U.S. troops were very well organised, and catered for, including the spearhead forces, and deservedly so. Since our arrival several days previous the American Army engineers had been working on the unserviceable lighting situation in the village, no doubt caused by the fighting in the area during the advance. They succeeded in restoring the power today Saturday 7th April, so we were able to listen in to the wireless set inside our requisitioned house, tuning in to either the B.B.C. news or the Forces programmes. The previous evening I had been requested to attend the H.Q. office. The attendant U.S. Army Admin officer was in the process of compiling a record of all the liberated Ex-P.O.W.'s under their charge. This entailed me filling in a form on which I had to insert details of my RAF service together with all my P.O.W. particulars. These were required in my case for RAF Records people in the U.K. in connection with prisoners who had been released from captivity. Following the excellent news of our impending departure I and the other lads were now standing by, somewhat prematurely maybe, but eagerly awaiting our transport Sunday 7th April slowly arrived, and what a lovely spring morning it was too, overhead gaggles of Allied aircraft had just passed us by, keeping the pot boiling, and the Germans on the run. Feeling on top of the world, I had recently finished a good breakfast and wondered if it had been my last American style meal. My preparations for leaving were now more or less complete, I was spruce and tidy with a clean RAF blue shirt, and collar which was the only clean item I had managed to hang on to. I had scrounged a black tie to finish off my appearance from a uniform point of view so in effect I was properly dressed, and ready for the off. It was now only a matter of waiting for our transport, my only article of luggage being my purloined attache case containing my Dad's present from the Reich, the consignment of prime Deutscher cigars my state of readiness was thus complete.

One could hardly term my small consignment of cigars as booty, the local villagers had beaten us to the punch, I found out much later that many returning P.O.W.'s arrived back in the U.K. with a varied assortment of pickings they had purloined from the Reich, amongst which were cameras, watches, Luger pistols, and even cumbersome items such as typewriters.

Obviously all the ex-kriegies were on tenterhooks during the weekend still patiently awaiting our transport, and the first leg of our trip back home, nevertheless we all spent a lazy, well fed day.

During the morning of the following day 9th April our situation had not changed. I had enjoyed another good night's sleep, but still heard the Bomber Command boys flying overhead keeping up the good work. Much later in the day, enjoying the after effects of the midday meal, I was reclining within our "borrowed" billet sprawled comfortably in one of the sitting room armchairs, more or less half asleep, but casually thinking that we had been forgotten. Keeping me company in this sleepy atmosphere were my three fellow lodgers, all Army types, but one was an American I cannot recall their names.

Suddenly a loud chorus of eager shouts followed by the rhythmical sound of running booted feet had the effect of penetrating my drowsy senses. I jumped up, and peered anxiously through the curtained window, had the trucks arrived? However I could not see any sign of an ex-kriegie in the vicinity, and no ambulance trucks for that matter. I knew something was happening, and while I was zealously stirring my colleagues into action, during the minute or two that followed I could not help hearing a vibrant stentorian American voice authoritatively ordering that all ex-P.O.W.'s should parade at once outside their H.Q. building. I needed no second command, and clutching my small attache case I was out of our requisitioned house in a flash, quickly followed by the other three inmates, to eventually join the rapidly increasing throng that were now eagerly congregating for places.

In the centre of the large village, outside the Yank H.Q. building, five fairly large ambulance trucks were lined up, and in an almost orderly line formation about seventy jubilant ex-kriegies in turn commenced to board their respective vehicles. Being more or less at the rear end of the queue I found myself climbing aboard "Tail End Charlie" the last ambulance truck in the convoy, our driver was accompanied up front by a U.S. Army padre.

Having said goodbye, and a big thank you to our host of American friends, who assembled to see us off, the truck doors were closed, engines revved up, our convoy was on its way. It was farewell to Oberweid, and our liberators, the U.S. Third Army.

It was just my luck to, inadvertently, pick the wrong vehicle to travel in what would prove to be a hair raising journey. Only a short period of time had elapsed since we left Oberweid when somehow we lost sight of the four trucks travelling in front and in our solitary state the driver managed to get well and truly lost.

Eventually he reached the stage of utter frustration, and decided to turn back in a belated endeavour to retrace the route, but without success. We now seemed to be involved in a very "dicey" situation which caused several of my fellow passengers to panic, one or two of them had really had the breeze up, thinking it was inevitable that we would be recaptured by the Germans. Their exultation of a few hours before had now changed to a position of extreme doubt. Darkness had now fallen, we were still motoring along tranquilly with our driver, and his Padre navigator hoping fervently that we were heading in the right direction, when suddenly I heard the harsh sound of gunfire close at hand. Our truck was then caught in some sort of cross fire, apparently from German units. Our driver was up to the occasion, and quickly responded, his pure reflex actions enabled him to run the ambulance truck off the road into the shelter of a tree covered depression for protection. The move paid off as the many lines of tracer fire now seemed to be passing overhead, missing our vehicle. We remained immobile in this position to lay doggo for quite a time until the xxk fireworks had ceased.

During this tense, and apprehensive period amidst the now spasmodic gunfire several of our occupants were still quite convinced that recapture was imminent despite being told to "belt up", and keep calm.

Luckily nothing untoward happened, and when all seemed serene, and silent the truck was started up with a minimum of noise, it seemed as good a time as any to make the break. We slipped smoothly out of our cover on to the road, and hopefully continued our journey with the Padre navigating, could he get it right. Whether by good luck, judgement or trust in the Lord we eventually found ourselves negotiating the ruined Streets of FULDA. Masses of rubble were evident, many of the buildings were gutted the aftermath of battle damage, but all was quiet, and they were no apparent signs of human habitation either civvies or soldiers, but it was pretty late at night. All this particular area had been in the path of the rapidly advancing U.S. Third Army spearheads.

Moving very slowly and tentatively along the dark roads we had quite a job finding the correct route out of this battle scarred town, but our Padre navigator ultimately struck gold finding the right road without getting us involved in any sort of fracas.

Although it seems we took the longest route, good progress was made once we got it right to head in a south westerly direction towards Frankfurt-am-Main.

In all it was a nightmare of a journey, more tense than being on "Ops", and a rough ride to boot, frankly one that we could not have done without, nevertheless the worst was now over, at last we were on course. All crew and passengers were intact despite the intermittent gunfire, all the bumping and swaying encountered over the rough terrain, numerous shell holes, creaking substitute bridges, with the darkness of the night not helping one bit. It was not exactly a piece of cake, maybe it should have been. Despite adverse circumstances our Padre navigator had eventually come good, and at long last our ambulance truck managed to reach the airfield, which was named Bad Orb, not that far from Frankfurt. Of course we were a few hours behind our E.T.A., but who cared now, we had made it, our time of arrival being twelve thirty am of the following morning. One thing was certain, it was a very much relieved bunch of ex-Kriegies that alighted very stiffly from the depths of our ambulance truck into the cold, damp darkness of the early morning at Bad Orb airfield. After such an uncertain, but eventful journey a very welcome drink of hot coffee provided by our American hosts eased some very dry throats. Very soon after we were bedded down inside a large tent for the remainder of the night, but not many of the lads managed to sleep as tongues commenced to work overtime. Naturally all thoughts were centred on the stark fact that ^{we} ~~and~~ would be back home in the U.K. within the following twenty four hours.

Five hours later I was indulging in breakfast when in walked the Padre who had accompanied our truck load during the previous night's epic journey. He had come in to seek me out for a chat, and during our conversation he disclosed how very lucky we had been to get through without any mishaps as we had apparently driven through an area which had been occupied by remnants of a German Army division.

I gave a low gasp of amazement, my luck must have been in to the last, a true survivor, it was a very pleasant thought. The other four trucks of our erstwhile convoy had indeed arrived at Bad Orb ^{airfield} some hours before our ~~truck~~ ^{vehicle}, and when I met some of their occupants after breakfast all were curious as to what had happened to us on the journey. They seemed sincere so I told them, not one of them laughed, I realised then that these lads had been genuinely concerned for our safety.

Some time later that morning I, and the rest of the homeward bound contingent were each issued with identity tags which we tied to our battledress tunics. We then hung around on stand by to await the arrival of the aircraft that would transport us home, these were expected to land at Bad Orb somewhere around twelve noon.

BAD ORB, was, of course, an ex-Luftwaffe airfield, and bore the markings of a much bombed aerodrome with bomb craters all over the place, and damaged hangars. The runways though appeared to be intact which, as far as I was concerned was the main factor.

Now as free as the air, our cheerful gathering of Ex-P.O.W.'s did not stray very far away from our marshalling point around the large tents, we did not want to miss our homeward bound aircraft. We did not have to wait long as very soon the all too familiar sound of aircraft engines was heard, as a gaggle of twin engined planes appeared on the scene to circle around Bad Orb airfield as they made preparations to land, a welcome sight. I could see they were American C 47's (Dakotas), and in fairly rapid succession twenty three of them followed each other in to touch down,

One by one the C 47's steadily formed up in a rough line after taxiing around from the end of the long runway, the time was around 1 pm. Within the following ninety minutes the organisers had marshalled all the homeward bound ex-kriegies into parties, we had been previously dog-tagged, so many being allocated to each kite. I climbed aboard a Dakota, lettered "M" for mother, to smell once again that very familiar tang peculiar to aircraft which brought back memories of yesteryear. Yes, I was going to enjoy my short "comeback" to aviating. Mingling with the rest of the passengers, I was the only blue clad RAF bod amidst an assemblage of khaki battle dress uniforms. The time was two thirty pm when the engines eventually opened up for take off, throttles were pushed forward, and the Dakota bumped along the the main runway to accelerated quickly, gathered speed to finally become airborne. At last we were on our way home, it was great to be back in the old routine of flying again after being a "penguin" for two years, consequently the following two hours or so were really exhilarating, and helped considerably to shake off the cobwebs. The C 47 did not pass over a great deal of German territory, but nevertheless I had a good view of many bomb craters, shattered defence lines, and much bomb damage was evident before passing over the River Rhine. I had done that many times during the past, albeit, in different circumstances, this time I had no heavy flak to contend with. My operational bombing career seemed to have taken place decades ago. For perhaps the last time I would have liked to have had an eyeful of the Ruhr Valley desolation, but this was not to be, as our C 47 was heading for France, and its coastline. I must say I was surprised when our aircraft circled to land at Le Havre on the French coast around four thirty in the in the late afternoon. It seemed that Le Havre was evidently an intermediate stopping point, or area, for liberated ex-P.O.W.'s. At this port of call everything seemed well organised, and we received a very warm welcome, a meal was laid on, and afterwards we were billeted inside several large tents where we spent the night. It was apparent that the following day, Wednesday 11th April, would be our "D" day, the D meaning destination England.

The last leg, the final lap, was under the auspices of my "old Firm", the RAF, who would now have the job of transporting us across the "drink", to the U.K.. Ten RAF Dakotas, real work horses these transports, landed at Le Havre between two, and three pm to accomodate all the ex-POW's that were on hand. I was a member of No 8 party, who again were almost all Army lads, I was the exception, and we ultimately took off shortly after three pm. Being one of the boys, I left my seat, and wandered up to the pilot's cabin to have a friendly chat with the crew. It was a great, but warm feeling to see again the good old English

coastline, following my enforced absence, and we crossed over near Littlehampton on the Sussex coast to continue flying inland for a spell, before eventually effecting a landing at our ultimate destination which proved to be RAF, WESTCOTT in Buckinghamshire. The time was precisely five p.m. .

RAF Westcott at that time was the home of No.11 bomber OTU, but for the next two months or so would act as a reception airfield for returning ex-P.O.W.'s along with two other aerodromes in the same area, namely Oakley and Wing. I had the good fortune to be one of the early birds returning to the U.K. for the great majority of ex-P.O.W.'s did not make it before the cessation of hostilities. In connection with this, it was shortly after V.E. day, 8th May, 1945, when Bomber Command brought into action "Operation Exodus" which involved the evacuation of the many thousands of P.O.W.'s from Europe in Lancaster bombers. When the trusty old Dakota "M" for mother finally came to a stop on the grass in front of one of the hangars at RAF, Westcott almost everybody aboard was in a general state of excitement, consequently many tried to get through the now open exit hatch at the same time.

For myself it was a tremendous feeling to once again jump down from an aircraft on to the grass of an RAF aerodrome, I was not aware of it then but it proved to be the last time I would do that. A deputation met us off the plane, and a wonderful reception was given to all returning ex-kriegies by the entire RAF personnel of the station, it was an emotional occasion. We were given cigarettes by Red Cross nurses, and then ushered into one of the main hangars where tables had been laid out for a king sized meal which was terrific, my first three cups of tea hardly touched the sides. All and sundry certainly enjoyed the festivities and the ~~service~~ ^{service} amidst a convivial atmosphere of merriment and laughter. In the meantime more planes landed with their cargoes of ex-P.O.W.'s, the majority being Army lads with a sprinkling of blue clad RAF bods.

After our enjoyable session in the hangar we were all organised, and the host of Army kriegie who were in the majority by far, left for their respective depots in various trucks. At that particular time there were only six RAF aircrew lads including myself, who had returned in that flight of Dakota aircraft, and we subsequently left RAF Westcott by motor transport for a specially laid on RAF venue which turned out to be the Sedgwick Hotel, London. We agreed this was a good "posting" even though it was for one night only, and once again we were well catered for, our own rooms, we could order anything at all that we fancied. The first priority however arranged for us was the sending of telegrams to our parents or wives, whichever was the case, informing them that we had arrived back in England safe and sound. As it was late in the evening it was generally agreed that a meal of Fish and Chips would be just the job, it certainly seemed ideal to me, I thought I had lost the taste for this dish it being just a memory, but it returned in seconds. All six of us agreed unanimsly that the meal was sumptuous. Afterwards, in a now relaxed state, we had plenty to talk about, and we did just that for hours as we reclined in sumptuous surroundings until at a very late hour we decided to call it a day, and hit the sack. What a delight to be back to normal with clean white sheets, and a lovely comfortable bed, what more could one ask I slept like a lord.

The following morning after an exhilarating bath, a breakfast of bacon and eggs, our small party of six, regretfully left the Sedgwick Hotel, London to proceed northwards on the final part of our journey. Our destination was No. 106 P.R.C. at RAF, Cosford, which was near Wolverhampton. This establishment was the main reception centre for returned RAF prisoners-of-war. Yet again we were given a marvellous reception, and soon settled down in the Sergeants Mess of this station. During the following two days we were issued with new kit, battle dress uniform, greatcoat, and other necessary items, in short fully kitted out. I subsequently sewed on my new flying brevet, in place of the old A.G. half wing was the new "S" signifying Air Signaller, and on each of my battle dress tunic sleeves also sewed on my "Tate and Iyles" (Warrant Officer's badge of rank).

My new battle dress uniform presented a really sad sight, it just hung on me like a bloody sack of potatoes, of course I had nothing to fill it out with, but I still looked like a refugee from Belsen Concentration camp, there was no hiding my skeleton like frame, and bald shaven head. I was aware that my fiancée, Monica would think who the hell is this bloke, he looks a different lad to

the one I last set eyes upon. Yes, no doubt she would suffer an initial shock but I had no worries where Monica was concerned.

During the few days we spent at Cosford each aircrew ex-P.O.W. had to undergo interrogation, and during my session I had to go through all the events, and happenings that occurred on the night I was shot down. Additionally we all had to endure a stringent medical examination. In that connection I do not know whether I could be deemed fortunate or not as I had to suffer a lady doctor, however I cannot say it made much difference to me. During our short stay at this RAF ex-POW reception centre I enjoyed a couple of nights out with the boys when we

visited several of the local hostelrys, but I could not accommodate very much beer. After I had disposed of a couple of halves I felt blown up, it would have to be easy stages for me in that respect. Exactly three days after we had arrived at RAF, Cosford we were all sent home, initially on twenty eight days leave, newly attired in uniform plus a few quid in credits to see us through. On the homeward train journey to my home town of Stockton-on-Tees I felt slightly embarrassed with my shaven head, and my Belsen type appearance plus my obvious ill fitting battle dress uniform. Many a curious ^{eye} turned in my direction during the rail journey, but only one passenger surmised that I was probably a returned prisoner of War from Germany, an early bird, true because as yet the War had not quite ended, although in its last throes. I arrived back home at precisely eight pm on the night of 14th April, 1945. RAF, Croft the base from which my crew had taken off on that fateful last trip on the night of 28th February, 1943 was only about twelve miles from my home so I had indeed travelled more or less full circle, an ultra long final trip lasting just over two years. In the process I had covered several thousand kilometres, a thousand of which I had made on foot across Silesia, and a greater part of Germany in that infamous "death" march which lasted as far as I was concerned from January into March, 1945. From Eisenach, where I dropped out of the march through illness, the ultimate objective Oflag 9 A, near Marburg was more or less a hundred kilometres further on, and as far as I am aware, from the one thousand RAF bods who started out on this forced march from Lamsdorf only a few hundred saw it right through to the bitter end.

When I arrived home my parents were out, and I guessed they would be celebrating the news of my return to the U.K. I dumped my kitbag in the shed, I knew where I would find them, and despite my odd appearance my parents were overjoyed to see me. Steadfastly I had to refuse all my well wishers inside the pub who seemed determined to buy me drinks, my stomach would not allow more than three halves. Much later on during the year I had the good fortune to meet up with my late rear gunner's brother, Flight lieutenant Bob Ward, who was on the point of

returning home to Canada. I acquainted him with all the facts concerning that fateful last trip from RAF, Croft, and before I bid him adieu I gave him his brother's wrist watch to take back home, it would be something to remember him by.

In the final reckoning it follows that throughout those years I most certainly had "Lady Luck" on my side, I had survived, over fifty thousand of my aircrew contemporaries serving in Bomber Command, including nine fellow crew members, and many close friends, sadly did not. Additionally a total of approximately ten thousand bomber aircrew finished up inside P.O.W. camps. These fortunate, I do not use that word lightly, crew members somehow managed to extricate themselves to escape with their lives from respective stricken aircraft, a survival ratio of one in seven. Most of them, like myself, baled out to hit the silk, and many were the hair raising experiences suffered during an untold number of such emergency actions, some of which bordered on the incredible. Of course this narrative has to end on a happy note, as all yarns should do, and my story is no exception to that rule. During my six weeks spell of special ex-P.O.W. leave good old home cooking, supplemented by my entitlement of double food rations, enabled me to regain all my former glory, and my thatch of crinkly auburn hair. Two months later, during the month of June I married my attractive ex-Land Army fiancée, Monica, the only girl for me. After forty plus years together she still is, a wonderful wife, and partner.

Some months after the War had ended I took advantage of my ex-P.O.W. status which enabled me to attend a resettlement course at No. 114 P.C.R RAF Newbold Revel, near Rugby. During the period I spent at this unit I thought very seriously of staying in the service on a permanent basis, but the post war Royal Air Force environment was not the same any more, so I eventually elected to be demobbed, and irrevocably left the R.A.F during the month of February, 1946.

Today a great many of the wartime bomber airfields that once were dotted around the counties of Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, and East Anglia are long gone having been returned to farmland. Nevertheless, relics of their past glory still remain in the form of water towers, delapidated Watch offices, derelict Nissen huts with their empty staring window frames, and many small areas of concrete hardstanding, all ghostly reminders of that epic wartime era.

Having said that, what was the fate of the bomber airfields I served on? . My last operational base RAF Croft, like many other wartime satellite airfields, was abandoned by the RAF a year or so after the cessation of hostilities. Its hangars were demolished, and as far as I can recall parts of the runways, and perimeter tracks were then used as a car racing circuit, but that was some many years ago.

However, during the present day, four decades later, three other RAF stations where I accumulated the majority of my flying hours, continue to remain very active bases in the RAF scheme of things. These are the brick built permanent stations which were either built during the pre Second World War period, or just after the commencement of hostilities, namely RAF Finningley, Coningsby, and Cottesmore.

On various occasions during the past twenty years or so I made nostalgic visits to each of these RAF stations. I knew that extensive post-war development ,and modernisation had taken place, but had not realised the true extent.. Inevitably, for the most part, not one of these once very familiar places was wholly recognisable as the airfields I served on, and knew so very well. In this modern jet age it was, perhaps, folly on my part to expect otherwise. Time marches on, it is only ones memory that remains constant. Yes, the feeling will always be with me, even more so in respect of all the many lads I knew, and flew with at both O.T.U, and squadron levels during those unique, and breathtaking days, and nights of Bomber Commands long offensive. The thorny path through a tour of Bomber operations over the Reich was long, arduous, and riddled with pitfalls, and along the way most never made it. On that ill fated night of the 28th February, 1943 I almost didnt, it was only my experience that saved me, even then it was a very close call, a very fortunate Wop/Ag.