

We called them 'packup' motors

Colin Grey (94461546)

158 Squadron, RAF Station Lisset, Yorkshire, flying Halifaxes

The crew

Pilot Jim Price, RAAF (KIA)

Navigator Bill Paredis, RAF (KIA)

Engineer Ron Stevenson, RAF (KIA)

Wireless operator John Hands, RAF (POW)

Bomb aimer Ron Whitaker, RAF (POW)

Rear gunner Darby Rowan, RAAF (KIA)

Mid upper gunner Colin Grey, RAAF (POW)



Colin Grey

Our crew arrived at 158 Squadron Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, October 1943. We had an interview with the Commanding Officer who told us of his being shot down and walking out of Germany following a railway line. He provided us with a few clues in case we were in the same predicament, and as spur lines could have us walking into a restricted area we could be shot on sight. We also knew that the Germans were awake to people following railway lines to reach Holland, Belgium or France.

Next night the squadron had big losses and 'Blue' Motteshead told us to watch the motors. They were Rolls Royces made under license by a company in another country. The rod to the supercharger was solid instead of flexible and would shatter under load. The crews and mechanics called them packups (Packards). 'Blue' had got his plane back to Lisset on one motor, with a large hole in the wing right near the fuselage.

That night we were to bomb Germany, the city of Kassel behind the Rhur. The plane had 'packup' motors. At the briefing the other crews put on a Star Turn, demanding that you can't send a sprog crew to such a target. The flight lieutenant who had, for some reason, been put in charge was not aircrew, did not know what he was talking about, and would not listen to anybody. If the Group Captain for the area, Lennard Cheshire, had flown in to take over, things would have been a lot different. He was always with the crews and often in the sergeants' mess when he was our Commanding Officer at 1652 Conversion unit. Aircraft were twin-engined Whitleys and four-engined Halifaxes.

We joined the queue of aircraft on the perimeter track and eventually received the light to take off. That went okay. We had flown all around England the night before but now we had a 16,000 pound bomb load. We crossed the Channel safely, but as it became darker I noticed that the starboard outer engine had a long trail of sparks coming from it. I was in the mid upper turret and had a good view of everything. I reported it to our pilot, Jimmy Price. 'Yes' he said, 'I can see it. I'll close it down'. Next thing the starboard inner had white smoke pouring out of it. He closed that one down. We were now flying on two motors on the port side. With our predicament we had attracted attention. A blue searchlight suddenly switched on, right on us, quickly followed by maybe forty or so ordinary searchlights and flak.

The pieces of metal were cutting into our plane as if a madman was running around inside the aircraft with a big axe. I had to yell at Jimmy to dive, dive get rid of the bombs and get closer to the ground. He dived, levelling out at about 12, 000 feet and dropped the bombs. I then had to report our port inner had caught alight and was burning fiercely. Jimmy had a steel mirror in his left chest pocket with his family photographs. The Germans showed it to me later. It was crumpled and would have had to be hit with a lot of force to put it in the shape it was. Undoubtedly it was this that killed him.

After the instruction to bale out, Bill Paredis dropped through the hatch at the front of the aircraft. He had his hand on the toggle of the parachute, bumped his elbow going through the hatch and so spilled his parachute in to the plane, entangling it around the radio etc. This left Bill dangling below. The wireless operator and bomb aimer jumped past him. The engineer was never accounted for. On hearing the order jump, I unlatched my seat which then swung down on its hinge, allowing me to climb down from the gun turret.

Or rather, this is what should have happened, but at this moment a shell hit right underneath causing me to be thrown to the floor below. It is amazing that in this short time it flashed through my mind of when I asked my father, 'What do jockeys do when they are thrown off their horses?' His reply was 'They try to pull themselves into a ball, so that they can roll and not get hurt.' I pulled my head into my chest and landed on the floor on the back of my neck, missing the main spar by a hair's breath. The main spar is a girder that runs into both wings, holding wings and body of the aircraft together. I have had trouble with my neck ever since, though not as much as if I hadn't pulled in my head.

I crawled to where my parachute was on the side wall and then to the rear door of the aircraft, released it, and kicked it out. The drill then was to kneel, somersault out of the aircraft, and when on one's back place arm over the parachute so that the elastic bands that pull the wrappings away allowed the spring to eject, pulling the chute with it.

Well, I did not do this. When I looked out of the hatch the flames from the port inner motor were reaching the hatch, so I slid out on my side with my back to the flames and as soon as the tail of our plane passed me, and fearing being hit by flak, I pulled on the toggle releasing the chute. Not

following the proper drill, I scratched my face as the elastic bands opened the chute, and the large buckle that held the straps together hit me under the chin.

I thought that I had seen the rear gunner, Bill Paredis, coming out of his turret, but either I was mistaken or he did not make it to the hatch. Had I chosen to use the forward hatch I might have been able to save him if two could go down on one chute. I woke up in a small paddock with a hedge around it and thought I was in England. I was confused. I was spitting out small pieces of teeth, then I could hear voices that were not speaking English, and I had a parachute partially covering me. It all started to come back to me so, gathering the chute, I pushed it under the hedge, covered it with my body, and hid my face so it would not reflect any light. Thanks to my army training they did not see me and left the area.

After some time I emerged and, skirting a nearby village, found a railway line with a sign on it. Something was 'verboden' so I did not follow it. That was a pity, because it was running towards the west. I then thought that perhaps I could find a road running west. I searched, but was running out of time. It was becoming light, so I hid in a raspberry patch and had to lie there all day. Men passed me going to work, and on a hill behind me was a row of houses, but I was not observed. The next night I tried to find a road leading west. I jumped drains, sometimes unsuccessfully, having to climb out the best I could, which was a painful experience as my neck was giving me hell and the fields seemed to have borders of stinging nettles.

Eventually I could see a road, but when I reached it I was confronted by a soldier with a rifle at the ready. My freedom was over. After may be a hour or so a car arrived and I was taken to Hamburg where I was asked all sorts of questions. Called an *Engländer Schweine Hund*, I corrected them, informing them that I was an Australian *Schweine Hund*. I rolled it off my tongue and they thought I was telling them that I was an Austrian *Schweine Hund*. Everyone in the room sat up and looked. So, I thought it might be a good idea if I asked for an atlas or world map. My interrogator said, 'Don't worry, we know where you come from'. Next day I was put on a train with John Hands and Ron Whittaker and a soldier who took us to Frankfurt interrogation centre, called Dulag Luft. Passing

through Kassel we saw plenty of devastation and a Halifax bomber lying by the railway line.

On reaching Frankfurt Interrogation Centre, I was put in a cell. I had not slept for days, in fact not since the day we took off to bomb Kassel, so sleep was catching up on me. I lay on a bunk in the cell and immediately went to sleep, to awaken some time later covered with fleas. Not long after the door opened. Raspberry tea and one slice of bread for breakfast. I had to roll out of bed to be able to get up on to my feet.

Dulag Luft

I had flea bites thick on my legs. The straw palliasse was full of them so the best idea was to keep off the bed if possible. No chair and I could not get to the floor, so I pushed the palliasse to the end of the bed and perched at the other end on the bed frame facing the door.

The other meal of the day was three small potatoes. In the morning I had a visitor with a guard. He was English, or spoke so well that he was a good imitation. He asked all sorts of questions, promising that he would have the windows opened. Big deal. Actually they were wooden shutters. I told him I didn't really care that much what he did with them. I had an idea that they were not going to be opened in any case. He persisted with questions, and I let him know just what I thought of him being English and that he should be ashamed of himself. He had an accent similar to people near Abingdon, United Kingdom.

He raced across the room and punched me on the chest. It did not hurt very much, perhaps because I was wild. He continued to ask me questions and, on not receiving answers, proceeded to tell me how well American servicemen were doing with the young ladies in Australia. My reply was 'you should have been with our fellows having a good time in London'. He did not like this very much for he took out his automatic pistol from his holster and just about shoved it up my nose. He told me not to be cheeky. Afterwards I was in the outside compound with the two members of our crew who had survived, John Hands and Ron Whittaker. They had the same story. John said the German in the black uniform asked him why was it sometimes when their fighters approached bombers their engines cut out. John said, 'Maybe they ran out of petrol.' To this

the interrogator in the black uniform just about shoved his pistol up John's nose.

A short time after this we were put in a railway carriage specially modified for carrying prisoners. It had a trestle for the guard to sit on so we could not get behind him or from the sides. It also had a steel floor. We soon found out there was no escape. We were taken to Stalag IVB near Muhlburg on the Elbe.



'Nice parcel you've got here, old man.'