

F/Sgt **Norman T. Powell**, 88, crashed with **Hampden I AE301** on **27 August 1941**. This is his account. He sent this on 14 March 2009 to **Allied Airmen 1939-45 DK** www.airmen.dk He refers to the story at HAM AE301 www.airmen.dk/p045.htm . In a telephone conversation he approved that it could be brought on the internet.

Dear Mr. Straarup,
I hope that you will understand my written words.

Since receiving your printout and following our telephone conversation, I have given your interesting work some consideration, so it is with pleasure that I send you this letter.

By and large your information about my crash in Denmark on August 27 1941 is correct, though I can add some more facts, some of which could be relevant, for example the dates I left STALAG LUFT 3.

I will relate exactly what happened on that fateful night.

My aircraft had approached the Limfjorden and to make sure that we would drop the mine in the correct place, we did what was called a "dummy" run, that is a trial run. On turning around to start the bombing run, we came under fire from the German AC, AC, we would be about 200 metres high. As I turned my guns to return the fire, we must have hit the water. I recovered consciousness under water and popped up to the surface, aided by my life jacket MAE WEST, RAF name for life jacket. The plane was under water, though I do remember my feet touching something, that was moving. I kicked off my flying boots and swam around, calling the name of my pilot but no reply. It was then I saw my yellow dinghy, I swam to it but could not get into it because of my injuries, however I could hold on to it. The dinghy automatically bursts out of the wing of the aircraft when it submerges. I could now hear the sound of rowing boat and the voices of the Germans but again I became unconscious. I don't recall being put into the boat but remember coming back to consciousness in what must have been a barracks room, full of Germans.

I was naked, they must have removed all my uniform. I was in great shock and shivering violently whilst a German officer was trying to give me a strong drink. Yet again I passed out and next opened my eyes lying on a hospital trolley with a nurse looking down on me who spoke English and said something about Xray. I was in bad pain for an injury to my spine.

I cannot remember but somehow I found myself back in my now dried out uniform and being given a large pair of worn out boots with no laces. I still did not know where I was.

However two soldiers half carried me stumbling and put me in a dirty prison cell with only bare boards to sleep on. It was here that I remember the German soldier who gave me a tomato. I think I spent one night in that prison. Next day two old soldiers escorted me to DULAG LUFT via Hamburg and they gave me some bread, which at the time I thought was a terrible taste. It was the first food I had.

Memory fails me until I arrive at Hamburg railway station, I now have fully recovered my senses and am aware of my true situation.

I recall a uniformed railway official say to me "You poor boy, should had not become an airman." I must have looked an awful sight.

I wonder what happened to that railwayman and the tomato soldier! And so to DULAG LUFT.

By this time I had now come to some sort of normality and was well prepared for interrogation for which I was properly trained, the usual name, rank and number. With hind sight I now know that they already knew all about me.

One interesting thing happened to me at DULAG LUFT. I was offered a very welcomed shower and there on the duck boards in the shower room, also having a shower, was none other than Wing Commander Douglas Bader, the legless fighter pilot. I of course knew him but he didn't know me and he thought I was a German (planted) on him. Amazing now.

He had been shot down about the same time as I.

After a few days at DULAG LUFT and given Red Red Cross food parcel also decent shoes I and other N.C.O.s airmen were sent by train to STALAG 8B at Lamsdorf near Breslua. It was a British army P.O.W. camp.

It was a terribly severe winter 1941 very cold and lots of snow.

Some memories of 8B. An SS officer emptying his revolver at a group of starving Russian P.O.W.s in an adjoining compound, when they rushed at the soup wagon. Also the typhus outbreak which was quite worrying, but being trained military men, by strict hygiene and inoculation from the Red Cross, also sound advice from a British Army Doctor we all survived.

In the spring of 1942 all the R.A.F. P.O.W.s were moved to a new camp STALAG LUFT 3. It was May 1942. It comprised two compounds, one for officers and one for N.C.O.s. I was there until Sept. 1942 (1943?) when with other N.C.O.s I was moved to STALAG LUFT 6 at Hedercrug, near Konisburg East Prussia.

We stayed there until AUG 1944 when we were moved to Torun in Poland because of the Russian advance and stayed at Torun for only three weeks.

At LUFT 6 the commandant announced to us the murder (my words) of 50 of our officers from LUFT 3 (The great escape), feelings ran very high, and Germans were rather worried. There was talk of a break out.

We left Torun for STALAG 357 at Fallingbostal which was near Belson. It took us two days in cattle trucks to reach Fallingbostal. When I now see films of Jews being pushed into the same cattle trucks I shudder. How can we ever forget.

At overcrowded STALAG 357 conditions were very bad; very little food and only a few Red Cross food parcels and also no letters from home.

On about April 6th 1945 we left 357 to begin the long march which lasted about three weeks. We slept in the open and sometimes farmyards, it was very cold and also snow. During this march a Red Cross lorry caught up with us and gave us food parcels. One very sad thing happened about this time, when we were attacked by our own aircraft (Typhoons), some 60 of our comrades were killed.

After that happening and when possible we would lay out the words P.O.W. in straw on the snow.

One morning early May we woke up to find our German guards had deserted and we found ourselves in no man's land. In fact we were in a triangle of the three armies, British, American and the Russians. I believe we were near the town of Celle. It was there that I witnessed Russian soldiers making German women to look at the shop windows which had terrible pictures of the death camps. They were shaking their heads and saying Nein, Nein.

A group of us, about twenty, commandeered a lorry and started driving westward towards what we hope would be the western forces. Driving around a corner, we were stopped by a British Bren Gun Carrier, manned by an officer and sergeant of the Welsh Regiment, myself, being Welsh, was very happy. They directed us to Lunaberg which somehow we managed to find.

At Lunaberg we were debriefed (interrogated) and flown home to England and after new uniforms, etc. sent home on leave.

For many years I always thought that the three members of my crew were at the bottom of the sea in Denmark but a chance remark from a friend encouraged me to write to the War Graves Commission and to my amazement found out that they were buried at Frederikshavn.

I wrote to the Mayor of Aalborg who put me in touch with Kenneth Kristensen and Ole Ronnest whom I soon met and were very kind to me. I went to the cemetery to pay homage to my lost comrades and laid poppy wreaths. It was the year 2000.

On the gravestone of my Pilot F/O Harwood is the name of baby daughter Ann who I last saw in 1941 so it was with great surprise, that five years ago Ann found me, I believe by way of the internet.

We have since met and we keep in touch. I took her to my Sqdn reunion, where at the Church, proudly wearing her father's Distinguished Flying Cross, she laid a poppy wreath.

She naturally wanted to know all about her father.

I know this has been a long letter but it is by way of a therapy for me because I still have nightmares about the war and P.O.W. life.

Before closing, I could mention a few facts about myself.

I joined the R.A.F. in 1938. I was 17 years old.

After training to becoming a wireless operator I joined my squadron in Sept 1939 4 days after the war was declared.

In August 1940 I flew into a mountain in England and was the only survivor of my Hampden aircraft. So I have twice been sole survivor from air crashes. In the England crash I fractured my back, but after six month hospital I rejoined my squadron early 1941.

I was promoted to Warrant Officer whilst a prisoner.

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Mr. Derek Thomas, of my Sqdn association, tells me he has been in touch with you. Small world.

A student from Bournemouth University asked me and a friend to help him with his dilatation for his degree. I enclose a D.V.D. for you to keep, perhaps you might pass it on to Kenneth Kristensen.

It was nice to hear from you and about your project. I wish luck in your work.

Yours sincerely

N.T. Powell

P.S. I am sorry I am not able to type this letter.