

19/5/81.

Dear Mr Gomersall,

Peter has shown me your letter, in which you asked if I could tell you what happened when I crashed in Denmark in 1943.

After thirty eight years my memory is becoming a bit blurred but certain details still stand out clearly. I don't remember much about the briefing except the target, the defence free corridor across Denmark and the need to fly across the North Sea below 2000' so that the German Radar would not be alerted.

The flight across the North Sea was uneventful; there was a full moon in an almost cloudless sky and every now and again little lights twinkled on the surface as bombers dropped drift markers. As we neared our ETA for the Danish coast I remember thinking "2000' is a lethal height for light flak, I'll get down low", which I did until the rear gunner called out that his feet were getting wet so I eased up 50' or so.

My first indication that all was not quite as it should be was when we came to the Danish coast and the lie of the sand dunes was not in the direction I had expected. Travelling fast and low and at night gave very little time to assess a pinpoint and because of all the other aircraft on the raid I hesitated to do an orbit to establish my position and so decided to press on.

Very shortly after crossing the coast all hell broke loose. We were caught first by one and then several searchlights, as we passed one lot further ones took over and because we were low they seemed to shine down into the cockpit so that I lost the normal protection afforded by the cockpit coaming and sides. At the same time streams of flak were floating towards us and our gunners were replying, the navigator was saying that there were holes near his station.

It was just about this time I thought I saw flames from the two outboard engines but they may have been flames from the exhaust. It was a fleeting glimpse from the periphery of my vision and not reliable and I thought to myself if we climbed we would make an even better target.

Almost simultaneously we hit the ground heavily – bounced into the air for a short distance – hit it again and ground to a stop. As we clambered out we were confronted by Germans who had come from a canteen close to where we crashed. Sgt Lewis was killed in the front turret and we were told later that it had been crushed beneath the fuselage. The rest of us were bruised and shaken but otherwise unhurt.

A couple of hours later when we were being taken to a guardroom we saw a returning bomber being shot down and crashing. It was higher than we had been and it is just possible that some of that crew saved themselves by parachute. We certainly hit the ground!

Yours Sincerely,
T.L. Howell.