

17/2/93

Gunnar,

I apologize for the delay in answering your letter. I have been trying to locate the Flight Engineer through sources in London. So far I have been unsuccessful. I am having a further try through another source. There is no record of him (Russell Collings) joining the RAF Ex-POW Association.

I joined the RAAF in October 1937 and completed my flying course and was commissioned, receiving my wings June 1938, in what was known as the Citizen Air Force. I transferred to the Permanent Air Force in April 1939 and completed further flying training.

When War was declared in September 1939 I was serving with 12 Squadron at Darwin.

After being transferred from 12 Squadron I held various instructing appointments until posted to England on 31st March 1943.

I completed operational training on Wellingtons and after conversion to Halifaxes was posted as Officer Commanding 'A' Flight, 466 (Australian) Squadron, 4 Group, Bomber Command, stationed at Leconfield Yorkshire on 25th DSeptember 1943.

The Squadron had recently converted from Wellingtons (twin engine) to Halifax (four engine) and received its first Halifax 111 (radial engines) on 3rd November 1943, and carried out its first operation on the new aircraft to mine the Dutch Freisans on December 1943. We carried 4 x 1000 lb mines.

I do not recall how many sorties 466 carried out prior to the 28/29 January, but naturally we did not go on every one. However, this information is contained in the Bomber Command War Diaries edited by Martin Millbrook and Chris Everitt (Penguin).

On the 28/29 January 1944 the Berlin raid in which we participated consisted, from records, of 677 aircraft, 432 Lancasters, 241 Halifaxes and 4 Mosquitoes. The original time of take-off was put back and I think we took off a little after midnight, and on the route you have on the map.

The attack and raid was as described in the Diaries and the Australian War History.

I was under the impression we had been hit in the belly when we had the bomb doors open, then later presumed that a fuel line was severed. We had crossed the German coast and approaching our turn point an engine failed, with a second starting to do likewise. There was a strong head wind across the North Sea, I decided to make for Sweden on the remaining two engines.

I had just turned and another engine failed so I decided to bale the crew out whilst I still had one engine for control, and that is how you traced our route on your map, turning and more or less heading for Sweden.

It was about 5am when we baled out in the order you have named, and like some of the others I landed in water. I unclipped the parachute, inflated the Mae West and trod water as my feet didn't reach bottom. The parachute started to drift away and as it was the only thing I could see in the pitch dark, I followed it. Wind more or less blows in a straight line and at least the parachute was going somewhere. I had only been going for a few minutes and my feet touched ground and I waded ashore. I pulled the parachute after me, crumpled it up and buried it in the sand.

I then opened my escape kit, took out a Horlicks milk tablet, and trotted along the beach as best as I could see, to get away from the scene and find somewhere to hide up. I did not climb any fences or cross a road but came across a shed which had farm implements and a horse drawn vehicle. I hadn't travelled very far.

We didn't wear flying suits but flew in our everyday uniform (as per crew photograph) so I had to 'run up and down on the spot' to get warm and allow the body heat to dry me out. I felt extremely cold but