

Prelude to 'A Jump in the Night'

The story 'A Jump in the Night' is an adaptation of a story that appeared in a Dutch Newspaper in March, 1970. The publisher is unknown to me. I found this story amongst my father's WW II memorabilia. It is the story of a Halifax Bomber Crew that flew as part of a major raid on Hamburg, Germany on the evening of February 3/4, 1943. His brother, Pilot Officer Jack Douglas Mackenzie, was the pilot of the aircraft. He did not return. The historical accuracy of this story is supported by the following excerpt from a 'daily operations' database maintained by RCAF.com, an association dedicated to preserving the history and heritage of Canada's Air Force. It can be viewed at the following website:

<http://www.rcaf.com/6group/feb43/feb3~4.html>

February 3/4, 1943

Twenty-five Halifax bombers from 408 and 419 Squadrons were joined by 17 Wellingtons from 420, 425, and 426 Squadrons on an attack at Hamburg. The crews were over the target at between 12,000 and 22,500 feet, releasing 36,000 lbs of high explosives and 96,000 lbs of incendiaries. According to reports, the target was cloud covered and bombing was scattered. The weather was poor, with icing forcing many crews to return to base.

W/Cdr M. Fleming from 419 Squadron returned early as the controls were frozen due to severe icing. F/O C. Porter, P/O M. McLaughlin, and F/Sgt. A. Bell all returned due to severe icing.

Sgt A. Jackson returned early as the turrets were u/s.

S/Ldr D. Clark and crew flying Halifax II DT-615 coded VR-P were attacked by a ME-110, there was no claim or damage.

Sgt B. Heintz returned early as one engine was u/s and the bomb doors fell open. They landed safely at base on 3 engines.

S/Ldr D. Clark and crew, flying Halifax II DT-615 coded VR-P, was involved in a combat with an ME-110. There were no claims or damage.

Sgt M. Gray was hit by flak over the target, the hydraulics were damaged.

P/O J. D. Mackenzie RCAF **KIA** and crew, flying Halifax II DT-630 coded VR-T, failed to return from this operation.

Sgt W. Duthie RCAF **KIA**

W/O2 L. Gonnet RCAF-POW

Sgt E. Marquand RCAF-POW

W/O2 R. Hill RCAF **KIA**

Sgt L. Gonnett RCAF **KIA**

F/Sgt A. Milton RAF-POW

4 crew killed and 3 POWs after being shot down by a Nightfighter. (FW 190)

A Jump in the Night

This story appeared in a Dutch Newspaper (publisher unknown) on March 28, 1970 by Ab A. Jansen. The Oral Translation from Dutch to English is by Arie and Nelly Van Ry (October 26, 2007 – Wpg. Manitoba)

The account is then transcribed, edited and enhanced with additional research by Craig Mackenzie (Beausejour, MB – October/November 2007)

As the evening of February 3rd, 1943 approached the Cremers family were going about the routines that had become typical for farm families in occupied Holland. They were looking forward to a birthday celebration for the head of the household. However, this evening was to be memorable for more than the anticipated birthday festivities. The Cremers farm was near Noor Sleen, a small village in the north eastern part of the Netherlands. Low threatening clouds had precipitated an early nightfall. A brisk southwest wind howled at the shutters and doors. Manufactured goods were scarce in occupied Holland. Consequently, the women of the household were repairing worn but precious articles of clothing. Some of the men were busy with small chores around the house while others read the newspaper, a paper that was getting skimpier every day. Accurate current news of what was happening in the war was rare. Yet, the Germans could not deny that the siege of Stalingrad had not gone well. The 6th German Army had fought a fierce battle. In and around the city that had been under siege for so long the survivors were freezing and hungry. They huddled in their blood soaked blankets while waiting with dread for their trek to Siberia as guests of the Soviet Union.

It was the third year of the war yet some rare spirits had been hoarded for special occasions. The evening birthday celebration was one of these. The first drinks were about to be shared when the family and their guests became aware of the sound of an airplane, an airplane that was in trouble. A few peeped out the darkened windows. Others went to the doorway. Several lightning-like flashes appeared in the distance. These were soon followed by a ball of fire that plummeted from the heavens. A deafening explosion accompanied another blinding flash. It was 7:30 P.M. and it was the end of the heavy Halifax bomber VRT “T” Tommy from 419 Moose Squadron of the Royal Canadian Air Force...

“T” for Tommy along with eight other heavy bombers had taken off earlier that evening from their base at Middleton St. George in County Durham. The target for this raid was Hamburg. Hamburg was a strategically important target for Bomber Command. The industrial city and harbour had grown to over two million souls since the outset of the war and had become a major production center for U-boats. Three nights previously, Hamburg had also been a target for night bombers. On that particular raid Bomber Command had used H2S Ground Search Radar for the first time. This new technology was being installed on special Pathfinder bombers to improve the accuracy of these operations.



“T” for Tommy was one of five hundred heavy bombers that had been amassed for this raid. The pilot of the twenty-eight ton, four engine aircraft was P/O Jack Douglas Mackenzie from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Prior to enlisting he had been employed by the Canadian Wheat Board. Doug volunteered in May, 1941, training at Brandon, Edmonton, Boundary Bay, B.C. and Claresholm, Alberta, where he received his wings in December, 1941. In spite of his youth ‘Doug’ was popular on the squadron displaying a good-natured confidence that contributed to the camaraderie of his crew. He had just

received his commission. His brother Rod had recently visited his kid brother and had been quite impressed with his skill as a pilot. Rod was in England completing his training as a navigator and would join 419 Squadron later in July, 1943.

The rear gunner was twenty-one year old Alexander Milton. Alex had already completed a tour of thirty plus sorties and was half way through his second. On the return from a mine laying mission in 1942 Milton had been the only survivor of an attack. He had been blown free from the aircraft and was able to open his parachute. He was well aware that the odds of surviving another tour were not in his favour.



Flying conditions were less than ideal. There was a strong wind from the southwest and in spite of the protection of the low cloud they had encountered severe icing as they crossed the North Sea. This made the Halifax difficult to keep in the air. The ice accumulated on the wings and fuselage adding to weight and reducing the lift of the wings. The crew had discussed turning back but as they had aborted their previous mission they decided against it ... a fateful decision. They arrived at the Dutch coast ten minutes behind the main bomber stream and as a result had lost the protection of the surrounding bombers. These huge raids were intended to confuse the Wurzburg and Freya radar systems of the German ground defenses. Operators would have difficulty directing night fighters to specific aircraft because of sheer numbers. As 'T' for Tommy flew over the coast and made its way across the Netherlands the crew realized that they were in an active fighter zone. There was an absence of anti-aircraft flak yet the skies were being combed by powerful search lights. The Freya targeting radar would be able to pick up the straggling bomber and direct night fighters in order to intercept it. Pathfinders were not common at this time. Crews were expected to fly independently to the target and back. All crew members were expected to be vigilant. Gunners, Bomb Aimer and Radio Observer were constantly scanning the sky. Rear gunners were in the habit of removing a section of the Perspex glass from their gun turrets so they could see more clearly. At cruising altitude it was so cold that the gun turret glass would fog up. Gunners would then protect their eyes with the same goggles that the pilots wore. The rear gunner was especially wary of an attack from below. It was not only his duty to fire at the attacking fighter but to direct his pilot in evasive maneuvers.



At one point Alex imagined a fighter coming in from the side but it was only a piece of dirt on the Perspex of his rear gun turret. Then came the attack from a Focke Wulf 190, zooming up and firing from below. With the underbelly of the fighter exposed Milton was able to get off a return salvo. The next fighter attack was deadly for the bomber and its crew. Twenty mm cannon shells ripped through the mid section of the bomber killing P/O Mackenzie and setting the fuel tanks on fire. Sergeant Garnet, the Navigator, tried to get his pilot away from the controls but was unsuccessful. The mid upper gunner, Sergeant Gonnet, a young French Canadian and the flight engineer, Sergeant Pete Duthie, were also killed in the initial attack.



The plane was now on fire and out of control. Alex could not see forward within the plane because of the smoke and fire. He decided to jump from the rear exit but his foot became wedged in some part of the aircraft. Pulling the ripcord of the parachute he was dragged free from the plane.

Alex Milton landed near Odoorn and was soon arrested by the German military police. He ultimately ended up at Stalag VIII B near Lamsdorf along with Sergeant Garnet where they spent the remainder of the war. Both were part of the infamous ‘Great March’ of January 1945. POW camps were evacuated in order to avoid capture by the Russian Army. During this march prisoners were often helped by the civilians they encountered and had difficult times only with the Gestapo.

“T” for Tommy crashed on the Cremmers farm in flames. One of the crew was thrown free but the remains of the others were burned inside the plane. Little of the aircraft survived the fire but bombs that separated from the aircraft had not been armed and have been found over the years in the farm field.

Alex Milton was living in Chiswick near London in 1970.

The gravesites of the crew members who gave their lives during this attack are near the crash site in the Commonwealth War Graves Section of the General Cemetery in Sleen, Netherlands. Sleen is in the municipality of Coevorden, Province of Drenth in north-eastern Netherlands. You will find the following information on the markers:

- P/O Mackenzie, JD (id. J/16924) Pilot Officer 419 Sqn. 21 years
- WO Hill, R.H. Hill, RH (id. R/79024) Warrant Officer Class II/Air Gunner 419 Sqn. 23 years
- WO Gonnett, LA (id. R/77325) Warrant Officer Class II/Air Gunner 419 Sqn. (Id. R/77325) 22 years
- Sgt. Duthie, WP (id. R/58766) Flight Engineer 419 Sqn. 21 years

The Commonwealth War Graves Section of the General Cemetery in Sleen, Netherlands



The Memorial Cross (Silver Cross) would have been awarded to the parents of these young men.



CWGC Commonwealth War Graves Commission	
Casualty Details	
Name:	MACKENZIE, JACK DOUGLAS
Initials:	JD
Nationality:	Canadian
Rank:	Pilot Officer (Pilot)
Regiment/Service:	Royal Canadian Air Force
Unit Test:	419 Sqn.
Age:	21
Date of Death:	03/02/1943
Service No.:	J/16924
Additional Information:	Son of Charles B. and Annie E. Mackenzie, of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Casualty Type:	Commonwealth War Dead
Grave/Memorial Reference:	Plot 12, Grave 284.
Cemetery:	SLEEN GENERAL CEMETERY

In Raid Over Germany



Flt-Sgt. (P/O) J. Douglas Mackenzie 21, a Halifax bomber pilot with the R.C.A.F. has been reported missing, believed killed, in a raid over Germany, Feb 3.

Flt-Sgt. (P/O) Mackenzie received his education at John M. King and Daniel MacIntyre collegiate. After graduation from high school he was employed by the Canadian Wheat Board, later transferring to No. 7 equipment depot, Notre Dame Avenue. He enlisted in May, 1941, training at Brandon, Edmonton, Boundary Bay, B.C. and Claresholm, Alberta, where he received his wings in December, 1941. Flt. Sgt. (P/O) Mackenzie arrived in England in February, 1942. According to his parents he expected to receive his commission during February of this year.

Flt. Sgt (P/O) Mackenzie was an active hockey player, playing with the Canadian Wheat Board in the old Brigden's Civic League. Besides his parents, he has two brothers, Charles and Sgt. Rod A. Mackenzie, a navigator, who arrived overseas in September, 1942: and two sisters, Glenys and Moira, both at home.



P/O Jack Douglas Mackenzie's brother Sgt. Rod Mackenzie at memorial service.

Original Article appearing in the Winnipeg Free Press, February 1943

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