

"My grandfather Harold Parkinson would often invite Uncle Bob round to talk about his experience. In fact Bob would regularly travel every year to the Isle of Man where I understand that the entire crew would meet to discuss their separate adventures. (I recall that Sgt George Thomas lost a lung whilst a PoW after being captured within sight of the Spanish border in the Pyrenees. He felt a tap on his shoulder as he was about to take his final route downhill. It was unfortunately, a German Patrol. George was the one member of the crew who travelled alone as I recall until he met up with a group of civilians trying to escape from occupied France. He had a terrible time and would never talk about his experience according to Bob. After his capture he was accused of being a spy and ended up in Buchenwald concentration camp. Bob and Syd ended up blackening their uniforms and took a similar risk. I had many recordings of our meetings and eventually did a radio play for the Hospital Radio in Wigan in which I described Bob's RAF experience. It is from memory of this, that I recall the following story (as the recordings are long since lost after the death of my grandfather) I asked Bob why he ended up being a rear gunner and was he not scared! He told me that he volunteered and went on to describe the power of the rear gun and told me that no fighter would dare take him on!

The Lancaster was hit by flak during a raid on Mannheim and one engine after another began to fail. Bob told me that he needed to detonate an explosive charge in order to turn the rear turret in order to escape from the aircraft, Bob fainted before he hit the ground. In fact he was hanging in a tree when he came round. He remembers it being very quiet and calm. Shortly after landing, he saw a German motorcycle approaching, that had obviously seen parachutes but it did not search for very long and soon disappeared. Next followed a cyclist who spotted Bob and shouted "Aviator Angleterre" but in a non-threatening way as I recall. Bob had been taught a special whistle that would be useful to contact fellow crew members in such a situation. After a few attempts, he received a whistled reply very nearby. The whistle had come from flight engineer, Syd Horton. After meeting up with Syd, Bob described opening his "emergency" food pack and searching for a cigarette! To his extreme frustration, the tobacco fell out of the paper and onto the floor! They carefully started to walk alongside a road in order to get a clue to their location. They soon spotted a bus stop that indicated they were in a village called Bar-le-Duc.

Further down the road they spotted a Public House and believe it or not, decided to go in for a drink!! The bar maid served them but seemed to get increasingly agitated with the two aircrew! It was when she started to speak in German, that they decided to drink up and find shelter for the night. This they did in an old barn within a farm yard. The barn was home to some cattle and they managed to get some well needed sleep without any further disturbance.

When they awoke, they could see no sign of German troops or anyone watching the farm and so they decided to take a risk and knock on the door of the farm house. Whatever happened, they obviously needed to find food and water. Their next action changed the whole dynamics of the situation however! The farm was home to a French husband and wife (I cannot recall if there were any children?) The woman was generally more supportive than the husband who was terrified that the German "guard" who regularly kept an eye on the farm, would end up discovering what was going on. Despite these fears, they helped Bob and Syd to "blacken" their RAF uniforms!

I cannot recall just how many days and weeks it took before Bob and Syd reached Paris? I know that they were provided with more safe accommodation food and clothing, by French

resistance along the way and that the husband and wife were not always of similar opinion about the risks they were taking! It was on their approach to Paris, that they had to hide behind some greenhouses as they first saw sight of a significant German military presence! They had obtained railway tickets to Brittany from Paris and it was an extremely nerve wracking few minutes as they boarded the train. They eventually arrived in Quimper in Brittany, where they were hidden beneath the deck (and amongst some fish I am told!) of a small fishing boat. The boat was inspected by a German guard before it was allowed to set sail and Bob describes hearing the boots of the German above his head as they both held their breath!

After a day or two in the water, they heard an aircraft and instinctively dived for cover! It was however, a Hawker Hurricane (I am sure Bob told me it was a Hurricane) and it seemed to be expecting the fishing boat! Upon sighting them, it immediately performed a "victory roll" and headed back home. I assume that the Royal Navy were subsequently alerted as I know that they were eventually escorted into Falmouth by the Royal Navy to a hero's welcome!"