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My dear Margaret,

Thank you for your letter and the notes and queries on Bob's escape in 1943. After 50 years the finer details tend to become confused, but I have written the record as clearly as I recall the events and hope that I have answered the queries put by your Canadian friend. I hope that my account will be of interest and help to you. Please do write again if there are any other details or points which you would like answered.

Oddly enough I am now writing to a French friend who again wanted to know more of the details. At the time he was a schoolboy living near to St Michel, who with his mother heard and saw what happened and witnessed the explosion as the aircraft hit the ground. He visited the still smoking wreckage on the afternoon of 6th Sept 1943.

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until he and his companions were chased away by the German guards. - He was 15 yrs old at the time. The guards told everyone that all members of the crew had been killed and that the bodies had been removed by the Germans. No trace of the graves of these men has been found!! (surprise) but the local village wished to erect a monument to the 'allied fliers' - hence the French interest - needless to say - they now know that we all survived!

It is interesting to note that even on the afternoon of the 6th there was already a rumour among the locals that 2 airmen had already have been picked up by the Resistance (Both Bob and Bill were picked up the night of 5th)

Please give my affectionate greetings to Bob - we sent Christmas cards and ring each other on the 5th Sept and I am sure that Bob appreciates the bond that still continues - even after 50 years!

Bob was after all my best man when I was married in April 1947!

Such bonds, forged in the times when we all depended utterly on one another night after night - in the face of such hazards men's characters are quickly revealed for what they are. Bob and I sat next to each other and survived many frightening experiences and came to rely completely on each other - our task after all was to keep the aircraft still flying. Whether "coned" by searchlights or boxed in by 'FLAK' - once for all time leaving Hamburg. The aircraft was peppered with holes and the instrument flying panel had a large piece of FLAK through it. We operated like a good piano duet - no time to discuss things!

Bonds so formed transcend the affections of mere friendship and do not need to be renewed - they are permanent. We cannot share this with anyone else and they will remain with us while we live "as a crew." I am proud to have flown with Bob and to have enjoyed his friendship while we were in Switzerland.

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I shall always remember him as he was in those days - solid, dependable and loyal. I grieve for his present state of helpless dependance.

Margaret, you have a Father of whom you can be proud - a man who quietly and efficiently completed everything that was asked of him.

A pilot who was respected by his crew for his calmness and devotion and by other crews for the steady quiet efficiency of the crew of Lancaster PM-U (JA 868) which was our own aircraft.

My kindest regards and good wishes to you and to all Babs Family

Sincerely  
Eric Dickson (Ret Lt)  
Babs Flight Engineer. (Ret)