

Bill + his wife Doreen live in Tragan Avenue on the haw top
and later in Whiteleas.

From the "Friends of Metheringham Airfield" newsletter June 2000

THE BILL HARDISTY STORY

Bill Hardisty was the mid-upper gunner in F/O Frank Crozier's crew. They were shot down on the night of 4/5th July 1944 on one of the notorious raids (for 106 Squadron) on St. Leu d'Esserent. The squadron lost seven aircraft and crews on two nights at this V1 flying bomb and V2 rocket facility.

He was born William Jones Hardisty in South Shields. In civilian life, after the war, he was a member of the Newcastle-upon Tyne Criminal Investigation Department of that city's police. Volunteering for the Royal Air Force at eighteen, he was sent for a medical at what is now the Co-operative stores in Doncaster, which had been commandeered for the duration as a Medical Centre.

From then on Bill's training followed a well-trodden path; St. John's Wood in London for 'square bashing' and injections, Bridlington to learn Morse code, the use of an Aldis lamp and dinghy drill, No. 4 Gunnery School near Morpeth for aircraft recognition and gun drill through August and October. After some leave he was sent to 14 Operational Training Unit at Market Harborough and Bosworth where he began flying with his skipper F/O Crozier and his crew. On to RAF Swinderby to fly the four engined Stirlings and thence to RAF Syerston's Lancaster Finishing School. At last they arrived at RAF Metheringham to join 106 Squadron just in time for their baptism of fire, the infamous raid on Nuremburg on the night of 30/31st March 1944 when Bomber Command lost ninety odd aircraft and several more when they arrived back in this country.

Bill's story continues in the next issue.

From the "Friends of Metheringham Airfield" newsletter September

THE BILL HARDISTY STORY

In Bill Hardisty's introduction in the last issue we said that he had been a member of the Newcastle CID. In fact he joined the London and North Eastern Railway Company Police then the British Transport Commission Police and then the British Transport Police. He served at Gateshead, Newcastle, York on the Special Branch and at Hartlepool, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. He holds the Coronation Medal, the Police Long Service Medal and the St. Johns Long Service Medal and bar. He is a member of the Flying Boot and Caterpillar Clubs and has the WW2 campaign medals, 1939-45 Star, Aircrew Europe Star with French and German bars and the Defence and Victory medals. We apologize for the error.

In the last issue, Bill and his crew had just arrived at RAF Metherringham in time for the notorious Nuremberg raid 30th/31st March 1944.

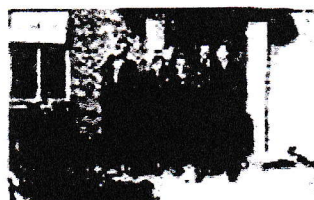
Our first operation on the 30th/31st March was to Nuremberg when Bomber Command suffered its most severe losses of the war. We were caught by one of the blue master-searchlights. Both the rear gunner and I shouted to the skipper to 'corkscrew' and he managed to escape. We were hit by flak, however, and the port wing flapped like a bird's all the way home. On landing we found the hole was big enough for all seven of us to jump through. *(The Lancaster was ME669, ZN - O, eventually lost on the Schweinfurt operation 26th/27th April when the aircraft was flown by F/O F M. Mifflin whose Flight Engineer, F/Sgt Norman Jackson, won the VC for his efforts to put out a fire in the starboard inner engine. Unfortunately, he was unsuccessful - Ed.)*



Cliff Churchyard

We went to Toulouse on the 5th/6th April in Lancaster JB641. The Met Officer told us that it would be foggy going out but clear for the homeward trip. It wasn't. Though clear over France it was a pea souper over here and we were diverted to Aldermaston, an American Airbase. We were given a meal but the Mess tables were filthy; butter and sugar all over them and jam dripping over the edge on to the floor. When we went to bed we had to shake the dust from the blankets and there were no sheets!

We had done thirteen operations by the time we took off for the V2 rocket store at St. Leu d' Esserent on the night 4th/5th July 1944. On the way we saw one aircraft shot down, at least we saw the flames in the sky and over the target more flames, which we took to be another aircraft going down. We bombed the target and turned for home just before five minutes past one. The navigator told the skipper, "Another fifteen minutes and you should see the coast." At that moment there was a terrific bang, on the port side again and within seconds the skipper told us to abandon the aircraft.



The rear gunner climbed out of his turret, made sure I was all right and went out through the door. When I reached the opening all the training, which wasn't much, came back. I took hold of the ripcord, rolled myself into a ball and threw myself downwards. I can't remember pulling the ripcord at all, but there came a knock on the chin, nose and forehead and then what sounded like a flapping blanket. I took up to see my parachute had opened. "Thank goodness for that," I thought.

There was a tale going round that if you brought your ripcord back you would be given half a crown. Don't ask me what happened to it for I've no idea, all I know is that it was no longer in my hand.

going though my mind at twenty thousand feet. As far as I can remember, we were shot down at 0105 on the 5th July. Our skipper died in the aircraft. He held it steady whilst we got out but did not make it himself.

The only parachute training we had had was to climb to the top of a hangar wearing parachute harness and clipped to a hawser so that when we jumped we fell to within two feet from the ground. As we swung round we were told to put our left hand to the right strap and the right hand to the left strap and whichever way we wanted to turn we pulled on the opposite side. We were told to keep the wind to our backs and bend the knees slightly. If there were houses or trees beneath you pulled on the right or left harness to miss them. All told I had about an hour's parachute training.

As I neared the ground I could see a little wood below so I pulled on my right harness and side-slipped. Then I pulled round to get the wind on my back and landed. It was not a very comfortable landing but at least I was down in one piece. We had been told to always bury the parachute but the wind was fairly strong and the ground was as hard as iron, so discretion being the better part of valour, I tried to roll it into as small a ball as possible. But every time I put it down the wind blew it out again. In the end I just left it and walked off into the wood. Suddenly I heard a twig snap. Heart thumping I stood perfectly still until everything was quiet again and carried on.

Soon I came to a road and in the distance saw two headlights. On the other side of the road was a ditch deep enough to hide in but just as I was about to run across two vehicles pulled up. This was it, I thought, I might as well give myself up but before I could do that the occupants jumped down and ran into the wood. I sank into the shadows. Soon the Germans came out with our Wireless Operator (*Sgt T N Perara - Ed*) They seemed satisfied to have caught him and drove away. I took the compass hidden in my battledress and started off in what I thought was the right direction, following a road but keeping to the fields beside it.

Soon I came to a farmhouse and found a water butt from which I filled the rubber water bottle in the escape kit, knocked off a couple of water beetles floating on the top and put in two chlorine tablets. Off I went again and as dawn began to break looked for a barn in which to hide. I soon found one and hid in a pile of straw. I ate some Horlicks tablets and chocolate and lay hidden all day.

When darkness fell I set off again and came to a field of potatoes. I wiped some clean on my battle dress and ate them with some dandelion leaves and cherries I had picked. Hunger was satisfied but raw potatoes taste like flour and water, awful! It was better than starving though.

I do not know whether it was the next day or the day after that I opened the door of another hiding place to see a figure kneeling in the corner. I was three-quarters of the way across a field before I realized who it was, Graham Price our Bomb Aimer. He was a New Zealander with a dreadful stammer when he was on the ground but calm and collected in the air. Many was the time when he was telling the skipper, "Left a bit, left a bit, right a bit, steady," when I thought, 'He's making a meal of it. Come on Graham drop those bloody bombs and lets get out of it.' I went back to the barn, "Is

that you Graham?" It was.

In the next issue Bill and Graham are found by the French Resistance.

From the "Friends of Metheringham Airfield" newsletter December 2000

THE BILL HARDISTY STORY

In the last issue, Bill Hardisty had baled out from his crippled aircraft, landed safely and made a bid to escape. In the corner of one the hiding places he came across the kneeling figure of his New Zealand Bomb Aimer, Flying Officer Graham Price. (The photograph in the last instalment of the Hardisty story was of his rear gunner Sgt C. L. Churchyard, the one below is Bill Hardisty - Ed).

Graham was an officer who had been to Oxford or Cambridge. He was well brought up and service life must have been hard for him. For instance, if I wanted to go to the toilet, I'd find a corner of a field, do whatever I had to do and use grass instead of toilet paper, but he wouldn't, he was very fastidious. Sometime during the night we came to a farmhouse. We knocked on the door and told them we were English airmen but we heard them telephoning the Germans and cleared off very quickly. I think it was during the second or third night that Graham collapsed. He wouldn't eat raw vegetables so had had no food. I had done a first aid course before I joined up so was able to bring him round and help him to the nearest barn. When daylight came, we saw a little girl and boy leave the yard as though going to school so after a while we went to the door and told the farmer and his wife who we were. They brought us two eggs each and coffee but just as we were sitting down there came a knock at the door. 'It's the Germans, the Germans', and pushed us into a cupboard. We thought we had been given away, but, in fact, they had come to buy some eggs and soon left. We finished our meal of bread, eggs and coffee, returned to the barn and stayed hidden.

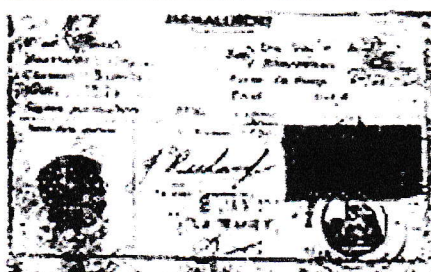
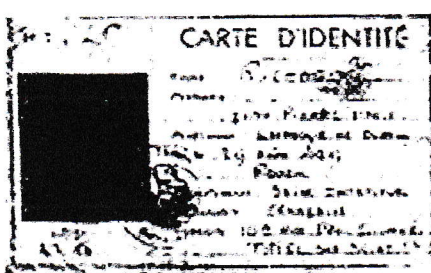
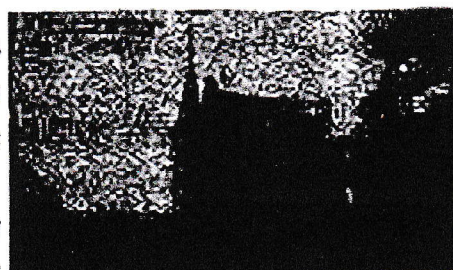


It must have been about two o'clock in the afternoon when the door was thrown open and there was a fellow wearing a beret, knees bent, pointing a gun at us. A Catholic Priest with him who spoke good English interpreted - he had been to Cambridge, I think, but he could not understand my Geordie accent so Graham vouched for me. We were told to take off our flying kit and leave our guns and soon a horse and buggy (with a hood) came into the yard. We were told to get in and lie flat.

We seemed to go a long way but eventually we came to a big chateau where we were taken to a room in which was the crew of an American B-17 Flying Fortress. The pilot had a lump of shrapnel in his hand. That night there was an air raid and the pilot was

put on the pillion of a motorcycle. "Now look," he was told. "You are deaf and dumb and you were hit by shrapnel in the raid." A French doctor operated on the hand and he was brought back to the chateau.

We stayed there quite a while and received Identity Cards and Work Permits. Every morning we had to get



out of bed and make them up to look as though they were not in use. However, one of the American gunners used to lie on his bed from about 11 o'clock in the morning and one day the Germans came. We hustled out of a small window in the toilet and through a door in the roof. It was difficult to return but we used a piece of rope to climb up to the window. The Germans found the bed the American had been lying on and were about to arrest the owner, Madame Valtair.

However, she managed to convince them that she had had a migraine and had lain on the bed until it passed.

We had to learn our new names, addresses, ages and employment and once we were word perfect we received a piece of chocolate as a reward. It was French chocolate and tasted awful but was great to have at the time. I

learned all my details, received the chocolate and half an ounce of cigarette tobacco. Mixed with it were dried leaves from the trees round about. We had to roll our own and although I had never rolled one in my life before, I soon learned. We were looked after and fed very well.

By this time in the war, the Germans were very short of petrol and used horses a great deal. Our fighters would come over regularly and, of course, horses were very often killed. When the Germans were out of sight people would come running out and cut great chunks off the bodies. They could not tell the difference between horsemeat and English beef.

As the allies advanced it was decided that we should wear civilian clothes and move to Rouen. Now, I was very blond and did not look like a Frenchman at all, so our friends took some soap and mascara, mixed it all up and rubbed it into my hair. I was given a beret and a bicycle and rode to the outskirts of Rouen. As we entered the city some Germans came out of a house nearby. One of them picked up his rifle and I could feel the bullets hit me in my back, but, in fact, he was only slinging it over his shoulder. Our instructions were that when we saw our guide get off his bike and lean it against a wall, we were to do the same. We had been given the exact tram fare so when he jumped on to one, we did too, gave our fare to the conductor and received our tickets. The trams were

single 'deckers', two fastened together.

It was not long before a German came and sat beside me. He said something which I did not understand, so I said, 'Non compris.' He said it again and I repeated, 'Non compris.' Just at that moment I saw our guide stand up to leave the tram. With great relief I stood up also, saying, 'Oui.' 'Oui.' And moved quickly after the guide. To this day I don't know what the German said or whether I answered him correctly or not.

We were taken to a three-roomed flat owned by a member of the French Underground, Raphael Hemming. There was a lady there called Alice, I never knew her other name. We had something to eat and then we slept. The next day Raphael took us to another flat over a carpet and handicraft shop in Rouen where we hid during the day and returned to Alice's flat at night.

One blazing hot day we had all the windows open and an aeroplane flew low over the city. The American lad who had nearly caused Madame Valtaire's arrest, called out, "It's a Focke-wulf 190." There were some children playing in the courtyard below and when they heard the American, one ran off to tell his mother. The next thing we knew there were Germans below and we had to climb on to the roof to another house next door to escape.

Bill concludes his story in the next issue when the Canadians arrive in Rouen and the Germans leave behind an open city.

From the "Friends of Metheringham Airfield" newsletter March 2001

THE BILL HARDISTY STORY

Readers will remember that last time Bill and his mates had climbed on to the roof of their house in Rouen on to the neighbouring one to escape the Germans

Soon the Canadians approached Rouen and the Germans left leaving an open city. On August 30th the first person we saw was a Canadian War Correspondent driving a jeep. Soon many photographs were being taken and one appeared in a magazine showing us riding into Rouen in the back of this jeep. Eventually the Correspondent took us to the Canadian lines where we gave our names, numbers and ranks. We were given some ground sheets to sleep on but it rained so heavily during the night that we found some string and rigged them like a tent between two trees. I did not sleep much that night and I felt that there were snipers in the trees round about. This was strange because up till then I had not thought much about the danger.

The Canadians gave us some Black Cat cigarettes before we left them whilst the French contributed Calvados and a bottle of Cognac. We were flown home from No 2 Landing Strip to Northolt on the 2nd of September. There were twenty-two of us aboard the aircraft and we were met by Customs Officers, would you believe! We were asked if we had anything to declare, so I said "Damn this for a tale!" opened the Calvados and Cognac and handed them round. "I suppose you think that funny," said the Customs Officer. "I can still charge you for them. Go on, get out of it." So we got away with all our cigarettes!

We stayed at Northolt two or three days before being allowed to go home on leave. We were lousy with ticks and had to take a bath every half hour with some blue disinfectant in the water. In between times I phoned one of our local pubs at home and asked them to find my father who was often in there. As it happened he wasn't there that day but someone ran off to find him. In those days only the doctors and local businessmen had telephones, anyway, he soon came on the line and I was able to tell him I was safe. He could not believe it at first for the RAF had not told them anything.

Two or three days later I arrived home amidst great rejoicing. I had lost a great deal of weight, down to ten stone and a little while later I was sent to a hospital near Aylesbury where they gave me a shot of insulin. I regained my weight and was sent on leave with double rations but again I lost weight. With another shot of insulin I was sent to a convalescent home in London where we were given as much milk as we liked.

Soon I was sent back to my new unit and trained as a driver. I had to keep my stripes

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covered because there I was just an 'erk' to the instructors. Eventually I was posted to a place called Blakelow where there was a Wing Commander with a double DFM and a DFC and who wore a caterpillar badge

"They tell me you were shot down," he said. "Yes sir," I replied

"What was it like?"

"Well I wouldn't like to do it again," I said.

We had both been shot down and he took me under his wing. "Get your qualifications," he said. "And I'll see what I can do."

He promoted me a corporal, then Sergeant and one day when I took him to Bristol, he was a Group Captain by then, he told me that when we got back I should be as warrant Officer and so I was, both MT and aircrew and I remained so until I left the service. I was eighteen when I joined the RAF, nineteen when I was shot down and now I'm seventy-five. As I look back there a few things I left out.

I remember one night when Graham and I were still 'on the run' when suddenly there was a brilliant blaze of light. We threw ourselves on the ground. A hundred yards or so in front of us was a V2 rocket launching pad. We lay still until there was no more light, by which time there must have been three or four launches, before making a very wide detour around that area. There were quite a few things that were not at all funny at the time and looking back I realise now how lucky we were.

I am still in touch with our French interpreter and some of the other Resistance people. Our skipper was killed, of course, (P/O Frank Crosier) and the Bomb Aimer was with me. When we returned to England, he as an officer went one way, whilst I as an NCO went the other. We had not seen one another for fifty years when one day his wife Joan rang to ask if I was the Bill Hardisty who had flown from Metherringham. She told me that her husband had been in and out of hospital since the war, so I went to see him. He could remember little of the war years, but he said, "You were Snowball, weren't you?" "No. Snowy" I said. "Because of my blond hair." I told Joan where to apply for the medals to which he was entitled, his logbook and his caterpillar badge. Since then she and her daughter, both Salvation Army Officers, have been going round old folks homes, Women's Institutes and Salvation Army Centres lecturing on the subject. About a year ago she rang to tell me her husband Graham had died of a heart attack.

The Navigator and Flight Engineer, F/Sgt A G Ross, a Canadian, and Sgt R R Mosley, were together when they landed. They found a French farmer who

looked after them and worked on his farm for the rest of the war. The Flight Engineer was a regular and after the war was Flight Engineer on an aircraft which crashed landed on an iceberg. They were stranded for quite a time but were rescued safe and sound eventually.

The Rear Gunner was called Kenneth Leslie Clifford Churchyard, not a good name to have in Bomber Command! He broke his leg on landing and although rescued by the French underground they found they could do nothing with the leg and so handed him over to the Germans who put him in hospital and so he became a prisoner of war. I met him after the war. He was walking well and had joined the Doncaster Police Force. About three years ago he died of cancer. I have cancer too, but mine is treatable. The Wireless Operator, Sgt I N Perara landed in the same wood as I did and he was the one the Germans captured. At the end of the war, as the Russians approached the prison camp, the Germans cleared off. He opened the gates and walked away, but was stopped by the Russians, who held him quite a while and so he did not see England again quite so soon as some of the other prisoners.

Thank you Bill. That is quite a story



Marie Richard
the interpreter

Marthe as bridesmaid at the
wedding of Bill and Doreen.

