

PETROLIA FLYER

DESCRIBES VISIT TO RUHR TARGET

Flt. Lieut. George Gardiner
Stresses Need of Teamwork

How does it feel to fly with the R. C.A.F. in an air raid over Germany? Civilians read the news despatches of the bombing of German military centres in a sort of casual manner and it could not be possible for anyone to realize what such a trip entailed unless he participated in one. But in the following letter received this week at the Advertiser-Topic office, Flt.-Lieut. George Gardiner tells in gripping and realistic fashion what it feels like to be on one of these missions and the story of his first trip brings home to civilians in a small way the great debt they owe to these airmen. One means of repayment would be for everyone to inwardly digest the thoughts George gives at the end of the letter and do his part in making a better world. We are pleased to pass on the letter to George's many friends in this community who will wish him and his crew continued "happy landings."

May 13, 1944.

Dear Harold—Operations in so far as our Squadron is concerned have been scrubbed for the night, so availing myself of the opportunity, I have elected to catch up on my correspondence. As Marion has told you, I have a personal friend of yours, Sgt. Bill Gillespie, in my crew as tail gunner, and knowing that I thought you would like to know just what a bomber crew is in for on one of our trips. Of course many facts will have to be omitted for security reasons.

First of all we are attached to R. C.A.F. Bombing Group, flying four-engine aircraft and our own particular "kite" is "K for King," a beautiful aircraft which does everything you ask of it. In my crew we have Phil our navigator, hailing from Montreal, Ron the bomb-aimer, and Freddie, wireless operator, both coming from Toronto, Eddie, the mid-upper gunner and the baby of the crew, is from Nelson B.C.; Bill, our gunner, calls Thornbury his home town, and for flight engineer we have

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Jack, coming from Derby, England. After months of training we have welded ourselves into a team full of team spirit and co-ordination ready for our first "op."

During noon-hour we find we are scheduled for operations, the afternoon is spent doing a methodical and thorough check of all the equipment in the aircraft and the aircraft itself. If it is necessary we test fly it but everything appears O.K. and I am quite satisfied so we leave the aircraft and go back to our respective quarters to write letters. Briefing time rolls around and we go to the operations room where all the crews are assembled. In walks the Wing Commander—tense—I'll say we are! He announces the "target." Honest, I swallowed a lump in my throat. It was to be a Ruhr valley or Happy Valley target, one noted for its defences. After this the different officers gave us all the required "Ein" re navigation, bombing, wireless, intelligence and our own tactics. Briefing finished, we go to the mess to get our operational meal, the best I might add. After the meal we go back to the flight, don our flying clothing and a transport takes us out to our aircraft an hour and fifteen minutes before scheduled take-off. Another check of the aircraft and then we gather in a circle with the ground crew to have a final smoke and chat.

The time has come for us to get into our aircraft. We are excited but we don't say much. We start our engines and while waiting for them to warm up we do another cock-pit check, check our inter-com. system, then when the engines are warm enough, run them up and check. Everything is O.K. so we roll out of our dispersal, down to the take-off position. We get the signal, open up our engines, 40-60-80-120 on the clock, and we lift over 30 tons off the runway. Take-off with an operational load is the worst of all pilots' worries. To keep the aircraft straight, not to swerve and listening for a faulty engine, not until are at 1,000 feet can you sit back with a sigh of relief. We circle the aerodrome, set course and are away on our first mission.

It is Phil's responsibility to keep us on track and in the "stream." He knows that and he also knows the rest of the crew have faith in him which inspires him to do his best. The first leg is a long one over the North Sea. It is a beautiful night, the moon is up but it is scheduled to set a half-hour before zero hour. As we near the enemy coast, the moon is still there, damn it! Will it never set? The fighters will see us miles away. But as we turn south towards our target the moon goes below the horizon and that worry is off our mind. Our "intercom" is quiet, except for the oc-

casional alteration of course from Phil and a cheery hello to my two gunners just to let them know we don't forget them. Everyone available is on the look out for fighters, constantly searching the skies. Searchlights are waving, trying to pick us up and as we get closer to the target they become more numerous. Ahead of us we see hundreds of them. That is the target. Will we go through them? Are we early? Where are the Pathfinders to mark the target? 30 miles ahead we see the markers going down—nothing to do now but go right through the searchlight area. In we go, weaving, doing everything possible to prevent the Jerries from coming at us. Flak is bursting below us, so there must be fighters up above. "Keep a sharp look-out, boys." Ron is in the nose. And why were searchlights invented—the skies are full of them. "Bomb doors open—steady—steady below." There is a sea of fire—hell has broken out on earth. "Bombs gone," from Ron. Hold it steady for just a minute longer to get a good picture. Then—"Hold tight and let's get out of here!" Out of the target area we breathe again. However, we still have a long way to go home and over enemy territory. Again a warning to be on the look-out for fighters. Bill sights one. "Coming in to attack." Into our evasive action we go. Tracers go by above us, the boys return the fire, the fighter breaks off and we resume our course. We just had the one attack and that was enough. At the enemy coast on the way out there is a barrage of flak. Once more you trust God is with you and fly right through it as fast as you can. At long last your own coastline looms up and then the lights of your aerodrome. Back on the ground again, interrogation, breakfast (ham and eggs) then to bed. But first we humbly give thanks to our Maker for being with us.

I have been on several since that first one, Harold. Circumstances differ somewhat, but basically they are all the same, but don't you think a nation could take a lesson from a bomber crew. You cannot live alone, within yourself and hope to survive. You have to work together, co-operate, give and take and thus make a better world. In the airforce that is the only way we hope to survive and thus between our ground staff and crew a very close friendship has grown. Needless to say we are confident of victory and sincerely hope the day is not too far distant when we can come home to our loved ones and our friends to live in a cleaner and better world.

Sincerely, George.