

# Ray Wall

A Prairie Boy Remembers



*Ray Wall was an enthusiastic supporter of the Bomber Command Museum, donating several artifacts during our early years. Following Ray's passing, his family donated his story, together with a wonderful and carefully preserved collection of several dozens of letters, his logbook, photographs and other documents that are the basis of this summary of his wartime experiences as a 408 Squadron bomb-aimer and Prisoner of War.*

As the war went on into 1940 and 1941 and the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan got into full swing, I decided that it was important to join the services and I enrolled in the R.C.A.F. in January of 1942. (I had been taking part time training with the Reserve Battalion of the South Alberta Regiment in 1941).



My first posting was to Edmonton to the Initial Training School at the University of Alberta. After six weeks of training there, selections were made for various departments of aircrew and I was selected to train as a pilot with posting to High River. It soon became evident to me that being a pilot was not my interest so I requested a transfer to other aircrew.

This followed then with a bombing and gunnery course at Lethbridge and later final graduation from the Navigation School at St. Jean, Quebec. Harkening back to my comments about not applying myself in high school, I did so in the R.C.A.F. and managed an average of nearly 83%, second highest on the course, and received an officer's commission at that time.

Wall, R.T. R.C.A.F. R.95A  
Provisional.  
(Air Bomber)

A I R B O M B E R S C O U R S E

Held at No. 9 A. C. S. St. Johns, Que.

From 8th March, 1943. To 16th April, 1943.

SUBJECTS	MARKS		FLYING TYPE	TIMES ON COURSE	
	Possible	Obtained		DAY	NIGHT
Navigation (Air Work)	100	80	Anson	20:00	12:20
Photography (Air Work)	100	87			
Bombing (Air Work)	100	87			
Elements of Navigation	50	36			
Signals Practical	75	71			
Photography	50	43			
Reconnais- sance.	50	46			
Aircraft Recognition	75	70			
TOTAL	500	520			
%		86.67			

Passes  
Backed

*P. J. Logan*  
Chief Instructor.



By now it was the Spring of 1943 and after six weeks waiting in Halifax, I arrived overseas having "cruised" on the Louis Pasteur. This boat had been towed out of a French port probably during Dunkirk time, finished construction in England or Scotland and later used to transport soldiers or airmen around war zones. You were unlucky to be posted overseas on this ship as it was top heavy and seemed to roll even with the movement of people never mind the motion of the sea. Several thousands made each trip with men sleeping on the floor, sleepers above them on tables, and sleepers above the tables in hammocks. The six day journey to England was not pleasant as you can imagine.



Canadian Air Force personnel were transported by train from Liverpool to Bournemouth where we were billeted in luxury hotels waiting for postings to flying stations. The proximity to the war was quite enlightening when German Messerschmitt 109's attacked Bournemouth from the sea and strafed buildings and parks with machine gun fire.

My first posting from Bournemouth was to Staverton, an RAF experimental station which was between Cheltenham and Gloucester. As flying crews were yet to be assembled, duties here were limited to guard duty and to general duties of lectures or parades.

Then a transfer from Staverton to a flying station at Honeybourne where we were crewed and received flying instruction on old Whitley bombers. We had a mixed crew with a pilot from Fairview, Alberta and the rest of the crew from Liverpool, Whiskey Gap, Saskatchewan, Vancouver even a gunner from New Jersey and myself from Medicine Hat. This station was called an Operational Training Unit. As most of us had bought used bicycles purchased for about Five Pounds Sterling and seeing that we were only twelve miles from Stratford-On-Avon most of us usually went once a week to that town. The travel was done at night in the dark but cat's eyes in the centre of the road were a great help for knowing where you were on the road. Normally our first stop in Stratford was to a back room in the "DIRTY DUCK" the correct name of which was and still is the "WHITE SWAN". Canadian boys could always get a plate of bacon and eggs, obviously a luxury in war time Britain.

DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND No.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	TIME CARRIED FORWARD:-	
						103.05	39.20
						FLYING TIMES	
						DAY	NIGHT
20/9/42	19.40	WHITLEY F.	Sgt. Griep	Bomber	C. & L.		2.30
20/9/42	22.15	WHITLEY F.	Sgt. Griep	"	C. & L.		.25
20/9/42	22.45	WHITLEY F.	F/O. Crosswell	"	C. & L.		1.35
20/9/42	00.20	WHITLEY F.	F/O. Wilson	"	C. & L.		.25
21/9/42	19.45	WHITLEY D.	F/O. Leggate	"	C. & L.		1.45
21/9/42	21.30	WHITLEY D.	Sgt. Griep	"	C. & L.		2.15
21/9/42	22.45	WHITLEY D.	F/O. Short	"	C. & L.		2.00
22/9/42	19.45	WHITLEY F.	F/O. Wilson	"	C. & L.		1.00
22/9/42	20.45	WHITLEY F.	F/O. Wilson	"	C. & L.		1.00
22/9/42	21.45	WHITLEY F.	Sgt. Griep	"	C. & L.		2.45
24/9/42	11.15	WHITLEY F.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 27. Combined Exercise	5.45	
26/9/42	14.	WHITLEY K.	Sgt. Griep	"	L. L. B.	1.00	
26/9/42	19.15	WHITLEY B.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 5. Combined Exercise		4.20
27/9/42	19.20	WHITLEY D.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 26		4.40
28/9/42	14.45	WHITLEY K.	Sgt. Griep	"	War Load	2.35	
1/10/42	19.00	WHITLEY G.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 6. Combined Exercise		4.20
2/10/42	19.15	WHITLEY J.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 6.		4.20
4/10/42	21.25	WHITLEY F.	Sgt. Griep	"	Ex. 5.		4.10
7/10/42	14.50	WHITLEY G.	Sgt. Griep	"	F. / A.	1.10	
7/10/42	19.10	WHITLEY G.	Sgt. Griep	"	H. L. B.		1.50
8/10/42	14.55	WHITLEY M.	Sgt. Griep	"	F. / A.	1.20	
8/10/42	19.00	WHITLEY K.	Sgt. Griep	"	H. L. B.		1.45
TOTAL TIME....						114.55	80.25

In the Fall of 1943 the crew was posted to a Conversion Unit in Yorkshire. Wombledon was the name of the R.A.F. station close to Kirby Moorside and near Scarborough on the east coast of England. The training here was done on Halifax bombers and it was good to see a familiar face once in awhile. Jack McIntosh who had been with me in high school in Medicine Hat was a flying instructor at Wombledon. Accommodation here was in steel Nissen huts and with concrete floors became unpleasant and cold with only one little stove and a meagre supply of coal or coke.

Later in the time at Wombledon we trained on Lancaster bombers which seemed to be sleeker and faster than the Halifax. This may be because the aircraft was more maneuverable. I readily remember flying in a Lancaster one morning over the North Sea and experiencing having our pilot, Bennie, shut down one of the four engines, then shut down another engine on the other wing, then believe it or not, shut down a third engine. We were able to maintain height and flying speed on the one engine. Quite a display of performance but reassuring to be able to restart each engine and to return to the power of the four engines.

					TIME CARRIED FORWARD:—		
					116.10	80.25	
					FLYING TIMES		
					DAY	NIGHT	
DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND No.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)		
2	3/12/43	HALIFAX "A"	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot.	C. T. J.	1.10	
2	5/12/43	HALIFAX P	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot.	C. T. J.	2.40	
2	5/12/43	HALIFAX P	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot.	C. T. J.	.25	
2	7/12/43	HALIFAX O	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot	C. T. J.	.55	
2	7/12/43	HALIFAX O	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot	C. T. J.	.30	
2	10/12/43	HALIFAX B	Sgt. Griep	Bomber	Air-Air; Bombing (D.N.C.O.)	2.25	
2	11/12/43	HALIFAX Q	Sgt. Griep	Bomber.	Combined Exercise X-Cty.	6.00	
2	12/12/43	HALIFAX M	Sgt. Griep	Bomber.	C. T. J.		1.20
2	12/12/43	HALIFAX C	Sgt. Griep	2ND. Pilot.	C. T. J.		.55
2	19/12/43	HALIFAX P	S/Ldr. Read	Bomber.	Two-Engined Flying	.40	
2	19/12/43	HALIFAX P	Sgt. Griep	Bomber.	The Homing	3.00	
2	19/12/43	HALIFAX C	S/Ldr. Chipling	Bomber.	C. T. J.		1.00
2	19/12/43	HALIFAX C	Sgt. Griep	Bomber.	C. T. J.		.15
2	9/12/43	HALIFAX Q	P/O. McIntosh	Bomber.	Three-Engined Flying	1.05	
2	9/12/43	HALIFAX Q	Sgt. Griep	Bomber.	Local Flying.	1.00	
						21.00	3.30
TOTAL TIME AT #1666 Con. Unit.							
DAY - 21:00 NIGHT - 3:30							
R. A. Read S/L							
o/c. "A" FLIGHT.							
TOTAL TIME....						137.10	83.55

During these first months I was entitled to short leaves and so was able to visit relatives at Ilkeston, Bebington, and Rochdale. The wonderful contacts made then allowed me to gain a close relationship with those who had once seemed distant relatives.

In late November of 1943 we were posted to our squadron at Linton-On-Ouse, outside of York. This station had our squadron, the 408 Goose Squadron and also another Canadian squadron, No. 426 Thunderbird. Each squadron had a complement of probably up to 24 aircraft but not all participated at one time on bombing raids.

We were soon into action with raids on Berlin, Hamburg and Magdeburg. After the bombing raid on Magdeburg it was interesting the next week to relive the raid over again by seeing a theatre newsreel of the raid. Magdeburg being an old city with many wooden structures became a flaming fire which was frightening even from a height of 19,500 feet.

# 408 SQUADRON - "A" FLT.					TIME CARRIED FORWARD:-	138:30	83:55
DATE	HOUR	AIRCRAFT TYPE AND No.	PILOT	DUTY	REMARKS (Including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	FLYING TIMES	
						DAY	NIGHT
2 8/1/44	22.10	LANCASTER C.	F/S. Griep	A/B.	Combined Exercise X-Cty.		3:55
2 10/1/44	17.40	LANCASTER C.	F/S. Griep	A/B.	" " X-Cty.		4:30
2 13/1/44	15.45	LANCASTER M.	F/S. Griep	A/B.	Air Test.	:40	
2 20/1/44	16.48	LANCASTER D.	F/S. Griep	A/B.	① BERLIN { 1/2 + very quiet trip. }		7:20
2 21/1/44	20.15	LANCASTER D.	F/S. Griep	A/B.	② MAGDEBURG { clear + warm lost Port Enter-T. diverted CALLISHAW }		6:35
2 23/1/44	17.30	LANCASTER J	F/S. Griep	A/B.	F/A. COLTISHALL-NORFOLK US. AIR BASE	2:00	
CERTIFIED CORRECT					TOTALS FOR JANUARY 1944		
					DAY	-	2:40
					NIGHT	-	22:20
							25:00
Russell 7/11					TOTAL OPS. TRIPS - 2		
o/c. "A" FLT.					TOTAL OPS. HOURS - 13:55		
H. Miles S/C							
c/o. 408 SQDN.							
TOTAL TIME....						141:10	106:15

As weather was poor in the following weeks it was into 1944 before we took part in a squadron raid and this time to Leisig, normally a nine hour flight there and back. This was one of the 900 plus bomber raids with the pre-take off briefings and the build up of anxiety to take-off time. Our usual load of several 500 lb bombs plus incendiaries was changed that night to a block buster and incendiaries. Take off on that night, February 19, 1944 was around 10:30 p.m. As aircraft climbed steadily and grouped for the mass approach on Germany, I would imagine that we formed a block of bombers one to two miles wide at 18,000 to 20,000 feet and spread along for up to seven or eight miles. Each aircraft did its own navigating but the main bomber stream was assisted by Pathfinder aircraft with sophisticated equipment. These aircraft dropped colored markers by parachute burning with 2,000,000 candle power. The markers were at turning points on the path to the target. Unfortunately these lighted areas were very attractive to the German nightfighter aircraft as the Allied bombers were then silhouetted in the night sky. German defences were stiff that night as we lost 96" aircraft each carrying seven men.

At this turning point, Stendal a town seventy miles west of Berlin, our Lancaster was attacked from underneath by a German nightfighter aircraft.

I can only recall a sudden shudder and an immediate loss of airspeed. Glancing out it was evident that three of the four engines were on fire with a heavy bomb load we were quickly moving into a stall position. The pressure increased until a person could barely move your body. You may have experienced a little of that feeling when in a fast moving elevator.

Our pilot was just able to control the plane and to get the bomb doors open and to immediately release the bombs. This at once made the Lancaster more manageable and we were ordered to abandon the aircraft. From an operational height of about 19,500 feet I suppose that I was first out from the nose exit which was about 20" x 20". In the dark and commotion before jumping, my parachute became partly loosened on my chest and I held it to me as I leaned forward and fell through the opening into the dark cold atmosphere. I pulled the chute ring too soon but it did not catch on the aircraft and within a few seconds the noise and fire changed to a calm float downwards in thick cloud. Assessing my condition I realized that the harness of the parachute must have cut my right eyelid and my right ear. Also I had lost my warm flying boots and I could feel the frost at that height in the sky.

As I floated down, the quietness was only interrupted once by hearing a German fighter plane drone towards me but I only felt the motion of air as it passed by. Coming out of the cloud at about 3,000 feet, the ground was totally white except a very dark blotch directly below me.

My first concern was that this must be a lake and that I must remember how to dump the chute when I hit the water. It was only at about 500 feet was there sufficient visibility to realize that I was landing in a forested area. As could be expected, the silk chute got caught in a tree top and I found myself hanging about fifteen feet off the ground.

Thankful to have survived this far, it seemed important to get away from the area as quickly as possible. Unbuckling the harness, I was able to slither down the trunk of the fir tree and into six inches of snow. I quickly found a cart trail and walked as fast as I could for about twenty minutes. Realizing that I was exhausted from tension and excitement, I moved somewhat off the trail and huddled on the ground under a tree covering what I could of my exposed body. Sleep seemed impossible and was. Not too long after I heard voices with footsteps crunching on the snow so I remained very still. I thought of German searchers but the people moved on elsewhere. It could also have been other flyers who had also been shot down that night.

# OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK

APPENDIX "A"

R.A.F. FORM 541.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT

By **NO. 408 (R.C.A.F.) SQUADRON, LINTON ON-FOUSE.**

**SECRET**

PAGE No. **SIX**

FOR THE MONTH OF **FEBRUARY** 19**44**

DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	REFERENCES.																								
				Up	Down																										
NIGHT 19/20/2044	LANCASTER II L.L. 632 "G"	F/S GRIEP, B.V. F/S TAMES, J.S. F/O R.T. WALL SGT MCKINNON, J.B. SGT PLUNKETT, W. SGT HUGHES, C.A. SGT MEIKLE, J.	BOMBING LEIPZIG (Second)	0006	- - -	This crew took-off from this drome at 0006 hours on 20th of February for bombing operations over LEIPZIG, Germany. Since the time of take-off, nothing has been heard of the crew or the aircraft. The returning time for this crew from this operations was at 0015 hours. Therefore unfortunately since no word from them has been received, they must be classified as missing. The names of the missing crew with their operational trips and hours are listed hereunder:	A. 2288 51																								
						<table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2">TRIPS</th> <th>HOURS</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CAN. R190923</td> <td>F/S GRIEP, Benedict Vincent</td> <td>(Pilot) 4 26.56</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CAN. R155727</td> <td>F/S TAMES, James Sidney</td> <td>(Nav.) 3 21.18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CAN. J. 25508</td> <td>F/O Raymond Thomas WALL</td> <td>(B.A.) 3 21.18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CAN. R. 70718</td> <td>MCKINNON, James Boyd SGT.</td> <td>(WOP/AG) 3 21.18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>CAN. R195341</td> <td>SGT PLUNKETT, William</td> <td>(A.G.) 3 21.18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>RAF. 1685192</td> <td>SGT HUGHES, Cyril Armstrong</td> <td>(A.G.) 3 21.18</td> </tr> <tr> <td>RAF. 927552</td> <td>SGT MEIKLE, John</td> <td>(F/ENG) 3 21.18</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	TRIPS		HOURS	CAN. R190923	F/S GRIEP, Benedict Vincent	(Pilot) 4 26.56	CAN. R155727	F/S TAMES, James Sidney	(Nav.) 3 21.18	CAN. J. 25508	F/O Raymond Thomas WALL	(B.A.) 3 21.18	CAN. R. 70718	MCKINNON, James Boyd SGT.	(WOP/AG) 3 21.18	CAN. R195341	SGT PLUNKETT, William	(A.G.) 3 21.18	RAF. 1685192	SGT HUGHES, Cyril Armstrong	(A.G.) 3 21.18	RAF. 927552	SGT MEIKLE, John	(F/ENG) 3 21.18	
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Left to Right: F/Sgt. Benny Griep Pilot POW, Sgt. "Syd" Hughes Rear Gunner KIA, Sgt. "Mac" Mackinnon Wireless Op POW, Sgt. Bill Plunkett Upper Gunner KIA, Sgt. "Mike" Meikle POW, F/Sgt. Jimmy Tames, POW, F/O Ray Wall Bomb Aimer PO.

The Secretary,  
Department of National Defence for Air,  
OTTAWA, Canada.



OUR FILE R149476 (R.O.4)

REF. YOUR

DATED

A I R M A I L

ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

OTTAWA, Canada, 29th February, 1944.

Mr. J.H. Wall,  
239-2nd Street SW,  
Medicine Hat, Alta.

Dear Mr. Wall:

It is my painful duty to confirm the telegram recently received by you which informed you that your son Flying Officer Raymond Thomas Wall, is reported missing on Active Service.

Advice has been received from the Royal Canadian Air Force Casualties Officer, Overseas, that your son was a member of the crew of an aircraft which failed to return to its base after a bombing raid over Leipzig, Germany, on the night of February 19 and early morning of February 20th, 1944. There were four other members of the Royal Canadian Air Force in the crew and they also have been reported missing. Since you may wish to know their names and next-of-kin, we are listing them below:

Flight Sergeant B.V. Griep,  
Next-of-kin, Mr. J.J. Griep, (father)  
Hines Creek, Alberta.

Flight Sergeant J.S. Tames,  
Next-of-kin, Mr.E.R. Tames, (brother)  
Buffalo Gap, Saskatchewan,

Sergeant J.B. McKinnon,  
Next-of-kin, Mrs. J.A. McKinnon, (mother)  
6568 Cypress St. Vancouver, B.C.

This does not necessarily mean that your son has been killed or wounded. He may have landed in enemy territory and might be a Prisoner of War. Enquiries have been made through the International Red Cross Society and all other appropriate sources and you may be assured that any further information received will be communicated to you immediately.

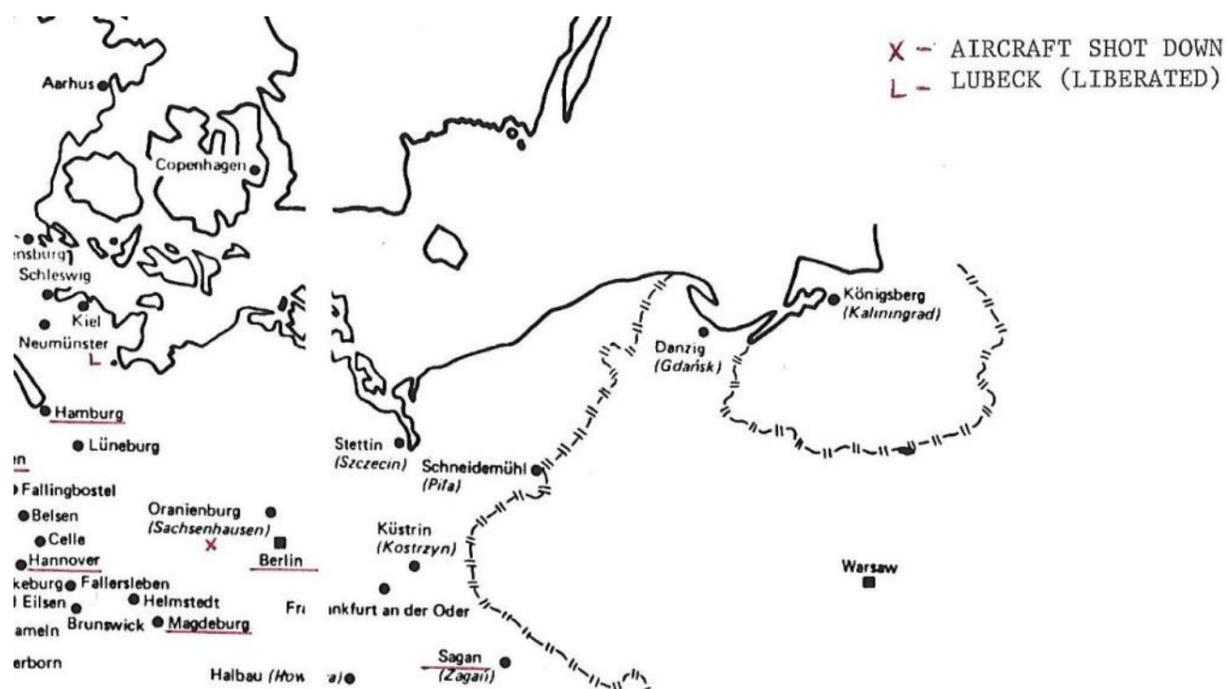
Your son's name will not appear on the official casualty list for five weeks. You may, however, release to the Press or Radio the fact that he is reported missing, but not disclosing the date, place or his unit.

May I join with you and the members of your family in the hope that better news will be forthcoming in the near future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "W.R. Gunn".

(W.R. Gunn)  
Squadron Leader,  
R.C.A.F. Casualties Officer,  
for the Chief of the Air Staff.



What a shock and a change of environment. One day flying with the R.C.A.F. and without much concern and somewhat divorced from the war due to the nature of flying. The next day, shot down with our aircraft in flames and crashed, both of our gunners killed in the attack and the remaining five as prisoners in Germany.

Being the only officer on the crew and a Flying Officer by this time, I was separated and taken by the Luftwaffe guards on a train through Hannover to solitary confinement to the Dulag Luft at Frankfurt-On-Main. It was a bit sticky at the railway station at Hannover as the civilians were making threatening sounds and gestures at me as we waited to transfer to another train.

Dulag Luft was a holding place where interrogators tried to weaken your thinking with questioning, hot and cold cells, and constant brilliant lights and a small window high so you could not see out. There was considerable discomfort here with bread, water and weak soup only being a foretaste of things to come for the next months until liberation in May of 1945. From solitary confinement a prisoner would be questioned but as prisoners we had been alerted that all we had to give was our name, rank and number. I certainly had no secrets to divulge anyway and at the end a German officer told me what Squadron I was from and who the commanding officer was, a Wing Commander Jacobs.

After a week in cells I was moved to another holding area of the same camp and soon a group of us were loaded into French railcars for a journey to a permanent prison camp. The boxcars were labelled "eight horses or forty men" and they went beyond that capacity for us as we could not all lie down at once and so had to take turns. The three day trip to Eastern Germany was very unpleasant. Almost no food and few stops. Water, if you wanted it was from the boiler of the steam engine on the train.

Our destination, Stalag Luft III at Sagan was located about 110 Kms south-east of Berlin and nearly at the Polish-Czechoslovakian border. Even though we had been on the train with English, Canadians, Australian, and others, it was a warm experience to be led into the compound at Luft III and to be so well received for news of the war and a concern for your well being. The trainload of prisoners did not all go to the North Compound as some were sent to the East Compound or to Belaria. I was delegated to a room in Block 121 which already had English officers and a happy Scot by the name of Fred McWhirter. I remember others too; Bill Lusty, Snodgrass Allen, Tommy Guest, E. Bond, Mike Cullen and the names of others I cannot recall.

Kriegsgefangenenlager

Datum Feb. 27/44

NATURALLY HAD QUITE AN EXPERIENCE BUT FINE & WELL. I AM NOT HURT AT ALL SO PLEASE DO NOT WORRY. RED CROSS HAS BEEN WONDERFUL & MEALS O.K. NOW. LETTERS WILL FOLLOW FROM PERMANENT CAMP PLEASE SAY HELLO TO MILLIE & JEAN AND LOVE TO ALL FOR NOW - Ray.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----

**Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben** *Wall*

Kriegsgefang. Lager Nr. 3 d. Lw. (Oflag Luft 3)

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke  
Nr. 5541  
Lager: Oflag Luft 3

Name: <u>WALL</u>	Staatsangehörigkeit: <u>Kanadier</u>
Vorname: <u>Raymond T.</u>	Dienstgrad: <u>F/O</u>
Geburtstag und -ort: <u>26.1.21 Medicine</u>	Truppenteil: <u>RCAP</u> Kom. usw.: _____
Religion: <u>Prot.</u>	Zivilberuf: <u>Student</u> Berufs-Gr.: _____
Vorname des Vaters: _____	Matrikel Nr. (Stammrolle des Heimatstaates): <u>J 25 508</u>
Familiennamen der Mutter: _____	Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): <u>Standal 20.2.44</u>
	Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert: _____

Lichtbild	Nähere Personalbeschreibung	
	Grösse	Haarfarbe
	<u>1,80</u>	<u>d. blond</u>
	Besondere Kennzeichen:	
Fingerabdruck des rechten 1. Zehns	Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen <b>26</b>	
	<u>Mr. u. Mrs. J.H. Wall</u>	
	<u>239 Second St. S.W.</u>	
	<u>Medicine Hat Alta</u>	

239 Second St. S.W. Medicine Hat Alta

Wenden!

Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke Nr. \_\_\_\_\_ Lager: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Bemerkungen:

**Personalbeschreibung**

Figur: mittelkräftig

Größe: 1,80 m

Alter: 23 Jahre

Gesichtsform: oval

Gesichtsfarbe: gesund

Schädelform: oval

Augen: blau

Nase: gerade

Gebiß: gut

Haare: dkl. blond

Bart: \_\_\_\_\_

Gewicht: 72 kg



CANADA

7-501-W

DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL WAR SERVICES

Ottawa, April 8, 1944.

Dear Sir:

Re: F/O R.T. Wall, J25508

We have just today been officially notified that your son F/O R.T. Wall, J25508, who was reported missing on February 20th, 1944, is now reported a prisoner of war in Germany.

You have already received the regulations concerning communication and parcel post and you will note that the official next of kin only may send personal parcels and this once every three months. Therefore, as soon as we receive the name of the camp in which your son is being held we shall notify you immediately and forward you an official label for the despatch of a personal parcel. In the meantime you may communicate with F/O Wall, c/o International Red Cross, Geneva, Switzerland.

Should you desire official information at any time concerning your son you are advised to contact this office direct, giving his full name and prisoner of war number (if any).

Yours sincerely,

*Lionel Lindsay*  
for GEORGE D. ALLEN,  
Prisoners of War  
Next of Kin Division

GDA/S

Mr. J.H. Wall,  
239 2nd Street S.W.,  
Medicine Hat, Alberta.

*wrote re label for blanket  
June 13/44.*

I shall, however, long remember Fred McWhirter. Fred befriended me from the first day and we developed a strong friendship which had remained strong in the ensuing years. Fred was an infectious person and did so much in our room and hut to help us all to keep a level of sanity in spite of our circumstances. Fred was the sort of man who could make you tolerate being hungry, being cold or hot and a calming influence when you were frightened or lonely. Lonely seems a strange word to use as eight men occupied our room at the beginning. As more prisoners arrived in the following year, our accommodations changed from double to triple bunks and by January of 1945 we had thirteen men in our room which measured about 16 feet by 16 feet.

Camp life was what you made of it with meal preparations of great interest to us all. The German supply of food was limited to one medium sized potato and three thin slices of black bread per person, per day. To this they added hot water three times a day but only enough for the people in your room. On Sundays we were given Barley Glop, a sort of porridge. Once a month, if lucky, we received a portion of ground horsemeat and or cheese made from fish oil. Sometimes as a treat, kohlrabi which had been grown on land fertilized with human excrement. Vegetables like this or cabbage were knowingly deadly to consume but we needed this type of food when we could get it.

Our salvation respecting a food supply was the Red Cross parcels which were received Via Switzerland from Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. In varying amounts, these parcels contained biscuits, spam, salmon, margarine or butter, raisins or prunes, coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, etc. depending on the source of the country. Initially, each prisoner of war received one box per week but later on due to a depleted rail system the ration was cut in half and even this became non-existent during and after forced marches.

With the very limited supply of food a person of a 170 lb Size seemed to fade down to a weight of 140 lbs or less, if you limited your physical activity.

I have today mailed next of kin parcel to Feb. 10/45  
*J'ai expédié aujourd'hui un colis de plus proche parent à*

NAME F/O R. T. Wall  
 NOM \_\_\_\_\_

P.O.W. No. 3541  
 P. de GUERRE N° \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign and return this card otherwise there may be delay in release of future labels.  
 This information is for record purpose only.  
*Veillez signer et retourner cette carte postale; autrement l'envoi des étiquettes pourrait être retardé à l'avenir. Nous désirons ce renseignement pour notre dossier seulement.*

Department of National War Services

<p><b>Sender: Expéditeur: Absender:</b></p> <p>Name: _____          Nom: <u>Mr. J.H. Wall</u>          Address: _____          Adresse: <u>* 239-2nd St. S.W.</u>  <u>Medicine Hat, Alta.</u>  <u>Canada</u></p>	<p>POSTAGE FREE FRANC DE PORT GEBUHRENFREI</p> <p><b>Prisoner of War "Personal" Parcel</b>  <b>Prisonnier de Guerre—Colis "Personnel"</b>  <b>Kreigs Gefangenen Sendung</b></p>
<p>For Prisoner of War:          Au Prisonnier de Guerre:          An den Kriegsgefangenen: <u>F/O R.T. Wall</u></p> <p>Prisoner of War No.: _____          No. du Prisonnier: <u>3541</u>          Gefangenenummer: _____</p> <p>Name of Camp: _____          No. du Camp: _____          Lager Bezeichnung: <u>Stalag Luft III</u></p> <p>Country: _____          Pays: _____          Land: <u>Germany</u></p>	
<p><i>aeh</i></p> <p>DUE DATE <u>February 14, 1945</u></p>	

Our barbed wire encompassed compound was about the size of four city blocks in area and this naturally limited the activities that could be done by 1,200 men. One of the popular forms of entertainment was circuit bashing. This was brisk walking at any time and for as long as you cared to around the compound on the inside perimeter. Roll-call twice a day was mandatory with much objection by some P.O.W.s who preferred to be snoozing at that time. When tunnelling was in progress there were sometimes close calls to get men back above ground, cleaned, and rushed out to be counted.

By 1944 there was a fairly good library in the camp courtesy of the Red Cross organization. Also the P.O.W.s had constructed their own theatre and keen actors and artists produced many stage events for the enjoyment of prisoners. German officers and guards were always in attendance at the first performance of the one week run. Canadian Red Cross food parcels arrived in plywood boxes and these were modified into our theatre seats. We also had a classical and a swing orchestra and the musicians contributed considerably to our camp life.

The men in each room took turns at the duties required in the room such as cleanliness, cooking, fetching water, setting the table, or other. There was one central washing area in each hut with ice cold water for doing laundry or showering. Once and sometimes twice a month we were able to have a warm shower at a communal bath house.

The huts that we lived in were wooden and really quite poorly constructed. There were main double doors at each end, a central inside corridor with rooms off to each side. The rooms had double windows but the single glass pane type and these were shuttered and barred by the guards at dark each evening. There was to be no movement hut to hut after this lock-up time. Searchlights and internal patrols with Doberman or Police dogs seemed to be sufficient incentive to stay put after close up by the guard

Some P.O.W.s were industrious and took study courses on languages, history, science, etc. Fred was in the forefront in our room in studies as through the Red Cross he completed a four year correspondence course from the University of London. This was so rewarding to him as he received his C.A. degree after release from camp.

As you can imagine time passed so slowly and at certain times in confinement it was easy to become depressed. Outside world news was limited what the German radio broadcast to us daily or from the news we obtained over our secret radio receiving the BBC news.

The highlight of camp life in the North Compound came when the "Great Escape" took place from Hut 109. What an exciting time to have experienced all that action. It was rewarding to have been able to be involved on the security end of the escape procedures. Our room was often a centre of goings on as Tom Guest was in charge of the preparation and Security for the making of civilian clothing out of Air Force or Army uniforms. Also Fred McWhirter spent many hours coding or decoding letters to his fiancée Mina Black in London.

During the winter of 1944-45 the Russian Army made great advances against the Germans and on January 25, 1945 we were given three hours notice to leave camp. From 9:00 p.m. until departure after midnight we all made hectic preparations to save what we could of clothing and food and to move out in the snow and cold away from what had been home to many for four to five years.

This first rushed march in the middle of the night was a bit unnerving as we were in somewhat poor condition. We tried to stay together as a room but our burdens of food, extra clothing, or souvenirs soon became more than a burden. Much was discarded in the first day.

In the first three days we were allowed to have rest stops in different barns. At Freiwaldau (37 Kms) I was struck on the head by a ladder which had been accidentally tipped over from the loft of the barn. Our best stop was at a glass factory at Muskau (15 Kms) which was being operated by forced workers from France. It was at least warm and dry.

We continued on another day to a German Army camp at Spremberg (24 Kms) where

we were provided with our first meal courtesy of our captors. The same day at 10:30 p.m. we were loaded into the familiar box cars for a rail Journey to unknown destinations. This time the guards mounted machine guns on top of some of the cars - "to protect us."

Two days later after a bad trip we were unloaded at Tarmstadt, near Bremen, and marched in the rain to a camp where we stood for a long time in the rain until they ushered us into the camp which had recently been occupied by British P.O.W. Navy men. Most of us contracted jaundice at this camp and a return to health was delayed due to the poor conditions of the camp. Total marching distance since leaving Sagan was 110 Kms.

After several weeks at this new location we were once again forced to move on. This time because of the break through on the Western front by the British Army. We had a false start on April 9th from Tarmstadt but hit the road in earnest on the next day. Again a bedraggled lot of men but this time in more pleasant Spring weather and moving in shorter journeys of from four to twelve kilometers per day. From that date until April 27th we slept out in farm fields and passed through such towns as Zeven, Bokel, Harsefeld, Jork, Cranz, Blankanese, Tangstedt, Elmenhorst, Bad Oldesloe, Benstaben, Hansfelde, and finally to Trenthorst on Saturday, April 28th.

Trenthorst was just West and a bit North of Lubeck, a city in Northern Germany near the Baltic Sea. Ever since our forced move from Stalag Luft III at Sagan it was evident that our collection of 1,200 Air Force officers were being directed towards Denmark probably to be held as hostages if that suited the German forces.

Even though we had been separated from our source of Red Cross food parcels our captors tried earnestly to keep us supplied with a daily supply of their black bread. Also in the last few weeks through Hamburg towards Lubeck we were able to slip into homes or farms and trade soap or cigarettes for potatoes or apples.

We knew that the British Army was closer now and the liberation came at Trenthorst on the farm called KREIS TORMARN which was mainly staffed by Russian and Polish prisoners. Freedom came on Wednesday, May 2, 1945 at two minutes past 1:00 p.m. by the 11th Hussars of the 4th Brigade (Cheshires). What a happy relief but we realized that it had been pending as the German guards had changed their attitudes to us in the last few days and in some cases longer than that.

By 7:30 p.m. the P.W.X. organization had arrived to arrange for our return home. We were documented on Thursday and on Friday, May 4th left Trenthorst via Lubeck, Louenberg to Luneburg. The next day again by lorry (Truck) to Neinburg to Sulingen. On Sunday from Sulingen via Diepholz to Emsdetten.

What a surprise at this captured airfield to meet Gordon Stringer from Calgary with



F/LT. RAYMOND WALL ON LIBERATION DAY

whom I had joined the R.C.A.F. back in 1942. Gordon was at this airfield as a pilot flying Mosquito bombers.

At Emsdetten we stayed in a bombed out jute string factory where all the machines that they used had been manufactured in Glasgow many, many years ago.

On May 10th, 1945, Lancaster bombers arrived to fly us home to England. We took off at 17:04 and landed at Bicester RAF Station at 19:10 p.m. to a wonderful reception by the officers and men, and the civilian staff at Bicester. Delousing was soon forgotten as we were entertained with food, beer, and a movie. My first slice of white bread tasted like cake.

The last notation in my dairy reads: 12:00 p.m.

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT WALL, R. T.  
J 25508