

**G**ENEALOGICAL research is an increasingly popular pastime and what you are about to read started out as just one facet of a family history. It began with research into the entries in one young man's wartime logbook and service record, but developed to encompass a whole bomber crew.

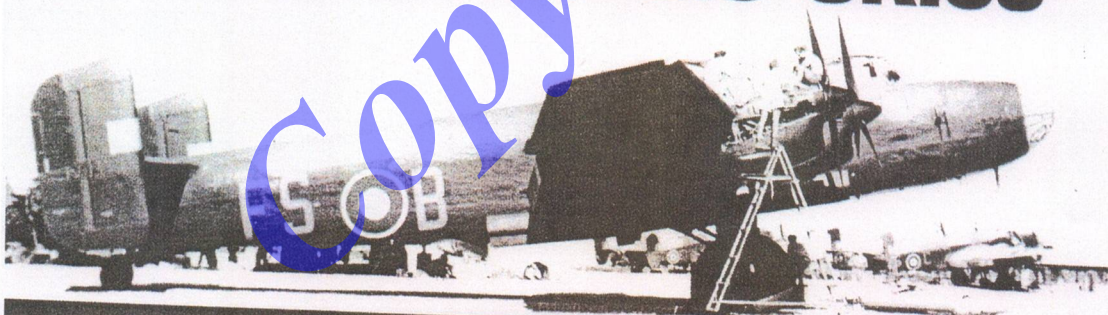
Raymond Gordon Ward was born on March 28, 1923, in the small Leicestershire village of Peckleton. Like many boys at this time, he had an uneventful boyhood and early youth. At school until he was 14, Ray then went off to work in the nearby village of Earl Shilton where he found employment in the local boot and shoe industry. Had it not been for the outbreak of World War Two he doubtless would have continued his life in this vein. As with the majority of young men his age, the war was to change his life.

*Ray - later 'George' - Ward. His logbook and memories of his crew have helped to reveal the exploits of an airman who helped bring aid from the air.*



Ray Ward flew as a Halifax wireless operator/air gunner in support of the Warsaw uprising and Eastern European partisans. Roy Bonser pieces together his flying exploits

## From Out of the Skies



On July 15, 1941, he volunteered to join the RAF and at Birmingham the next day an Aircrew Selection Board recommended him for training as a wireless operator. He did not enter the service immediately, but was placed on the reserve until November 11, 1941 when his call-up papers arrived ordering him to report to 3 Recruit Centre. After initial training he went to 10 (Signals) Recruit Centre before

*No.148 Squadron dispersals at Brindisi. Beautifully framed is Halifax II JP246 'B'. This machine came to grief when the undercarriage collapsed on return from a 'Special Duties' sortie on October 8, 1944.*  
ALL RAY WARD VIA AUTHOR

being posted to 2 Signals School at Yatesbury, Wiltshire, for technical training.

When his course finished, he was first posted to 2 Heavy Mobile Unit on June 4, 1942. What the function of this unit was I haven't been able to find out, but after four months Ray was once again on the move, this time to 140 Squadron, Mount Farm, Oxford. His stay with this unit

was very brief, a matter of just over a fortnight, then orders came for him to move once more. (They were flying a mix of Supermarine Spitfire Is and IVs, and Bristol Blenheim IVs at that time - ED.)

Up until now I believe he had been employed on ground radio only but his next posting, on October 29, 1942 was to 4 Signals School, Madley, Hereford. Here he began his



aircrew training as a wireless operator/air gunner. Flying in de Havilland Dominies and Percival Proctors, he received 18½ hours' airborne experience in addition to school exercises. His course at Madley successfully completed, he journeyed north to Cumbria and 10 Air Gunnery School at Barrow-in-Furness (also known as Walney Island) for his gunnery training. Here the practical element of the course was very brief. Initially to familiarise him mainly with turret operation 650 rounds of ammunition were expended in range practice. Then, over the course of three days seven flights were made in seven different Boulton Paul Defiants. From the turrets of these he shot off 25ft (7.7m) of cine gun film and fired 1,200 rounds of 0.303 ammunition at towed drogues and at sea targets. He finished this course, the flying element of which only amounted to five minutes short of three hours, with exam results of 78.7% and an 'above average' classification for practical work.

#### RAY BECOMES 'GEORGE'

Next he was off to Oxfordshire to join 10 Operational Training Unit at Stanton Harcourt. The purpose of this unit was to bring together various personnel who had received their individual trade training at many different locations and to form them into a cohesive crew to fly on operations against the enemy. It was there that Ray met up with Sergeant Charles 'Charlie' M Hall the pilot with whom he was destined to make the majority of his operational flights. The rest of the crew assembled here consisted of Harry Wild, navigator; William 'Taff' Nicholas, bomb aimer; Phil Williams, rear gunner and, the only Australian in the crew, Vic Murphy as mid-upper gunner.

It was also here at Stanton Harcourt that Ray became 'George' - the name



At Rabat, en route to 462 Squadron. Left to right: Harry Wild, 'Taff' Nicholas, Vic Murphy.

#### RESULTS OF AB INITIO COURSES AND REMARKS

##### RESULTS OF AB INITIO GUNNERY COURSE.

STATION HELD.....No. 10 A.G.S. BARROW.....  
PERIOD OF COURSE.....TO.....

EXERCISE.	Rounds Fired	Hits	Type of Aircraft
25 Yds. Range.	200	N/A.	N/A.
200 Yds. Range.	200	N/A.	DEFIANT.
400 Yds. Range.	250	N/A.	-do-
HOME EXERCISE.	400	41	DEFIANT.
CLUB EXERCISE.	25 FT	N/A.	-do-
TRACER EXERCISE.	200	N/A.	-do-
REAR.	100	4.0	-do-
Q.X.U.F.	100	0.5	-do-
Air to Sea.	200	N/A.	-do-

FLYING TIME  
TOTAL.....  
MARKS.....78.7%.....

REMARKS: PASTOR  
Emergency. Kranis and...  
THREAT. Cruise  
PRACTICE. Above average  
G. T. Openshaw.  
Chief Instructor

had been made carrying out various exercises both by day and night.

A successful completion of the course meant that it was time to move on again, now as an almost complete crew. Yorkshire was the destination where they were to join 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit at Riccall, north of Selby. Here to complete their complement they acquired as Flight Engineer, Pat Tall, a Bristol man. They were also soon introduced to the aircraft they were eventually to fly on operations, it was the four-engined heavy bomber, Handley Page Halifax. The conversion course at Riccall proved to be of a concentrated nature and in the short space of 15 days and 20 flights totalling 47 hours 15 minutes they were found to be proficient as a crew and deemed fit to fly a heavy bomber.

#### MIDDLE EAST BOUND - TWICE

Posted on once more, they journeyed south to join 301 Ferry Training Unit at Lyneham, Wiltshire. The purpose of this unit was to familiarise crews with the procedures and possible hazards involved in making long distance flights to deliver aircraft

to other war zones overseas.

They were allocated Halifax II BB439 and after carrying out various air tests they were ready to set out for the Middle East. Before the journey commenced they lost one of their number, this was tail gunner Phil Williams. When they were informed they were destined for the Middle East the powers-that-be realised that a mid-upper gunner would be surplus to requirement as Halifaxes in that theatre had no top turrets. So, Phil was posted out to join a Bomber Command unit. Why he was chosen and not Vic Murphy remains a mystery. Vic was to stay with the crew for the remainder of their active service.

They set out from Lyneham at 11:20 hours on September 21, 1943 but after 45 minutes were forced to divert to Holmsley South, Hampshire. The cause of the diversion must have been minor, for they were able to leave Holmsley at 14:45 and fly the short distance to 3 Overseas Aircraft Dispatch Unit (OADU) at Hurn near Boumemouth. Departure from Hurn on the next leg was made at 03:15 on September 23, and nine hours later they landed at Rabat-Sale, Morocco.

However, the landing was not without its problems for while in



the circuit to land one of BB439's engines packed up and could not be restarted. Normally they would have carried on, delivering the aircraft to an active unit, but as a replacement for the duff engine was not readily available they left the Halifax where it was and were ordered to return to the UK. The journey back, which began on September 26, was undertaken in Douglas Dakota G-AGFY of the British Overseas Airways Corporation, but not without difficulties. They set out at 20:50 but three hours into the flight due to adverse winds and the possibility of fuel problems they were forced to return to Rabat.

Next day they flew across to Gibraltar to begin over again from there. At almost midnight on October 1 they set out again, but 4 hours 40 minutes into the flight they were once more



forced to return, this time mechanical problems were thought to be the reason. Their Dakota took off from Gibraltar at 22:45 on October 3, and this time it proved to be third time lucky, after 9½ hours they made a successful landing in England.

The crew returned to 301 FTU where they air tested several Halifaxes before they were finally allocated Mk.II JN913, in which they were eventually to return to North Africa. First though they flew JN913 to 3 Overseas Aircraft Preparation Unit at Llandow in South Wales on October 28. Then, after almost a week, they flew once more to 3 OADU at Hurn.

Their second overseas odyssey began at 02:40 hours on November 6 and over the course of the next nine days they flew first from Hurn to Gibraltar,



The ground echelon of 462 Squadron motoring from Terria to El Adem, January 1944.

then across North Africa via Rabat-Sale, Biskra, Benina and Berka before reaching Terria, south of Benghazi in Libya on November 14. Here they joined 462 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force.

#### WITH 'AUSSIES' ON 'OPS'

The remainder of the month was used as a settling in period during which George participated in several exercises but was flown by other squadron pilots. He teamed up again with Charlie Hall on December 5 when operations began for the crew with a night raid on a goods yard on Salonika, Greece. A further five night operations followed in quick succession, the targets being anti-aircraft defences and harbour installations in Greece and Crete.

A short spell of leave in Egypt followed at the end of the month and into the New Year when a return was made to the squadron, now at El Adem, south of Tobruk, Libya on January 8, 1944.

'Ops' were resumed by the crew on January 11 and continued into February. All, as before, were against harbour installations in Greece or anti-aircraft defences on the island of Crete.

It was at El Adem that George was able to demonstrate a flair for improvisation. The crew had Smith and Wesson 0.38in calibre revolvers issued but no ammunition was available. However, large quantities of 9mm cartridges of German and Italian origin had been left lying around. Although not quite the right calibre

and rimless George found that a small piece of fine wire wound in the groove at the base of the cartridge served as a rim and enabled the case to be ejected after firing. From then on many an enjoyable hour was spent using these wire-wound rounds, with some of the thousands of empty bottles that littered the place serving as targets.

At the end of February or early March the squadron undertook a major move, and flew from North Africa to take up residence in Italy at Celone, east of Foggia. Charlie's crew made the seven-hour flight to

LEFT: Mid-upper gunner Vic Murphy getting in some smaller calibre practice at El Adem.



Flight engineer Pat Tall at El Adem.

their new home on March 1. In the process, the unit was renumbered to become 614 (County of Glamorgan) Squadron, an RAF Auxiliary Air Force unit, on March 3. The crew did not fly many 'ops' while at Celone, however on March 11 they did take part in a raid on marshalling yards at Genoa, Italy. Seven of 614's Halifaxes were involved and all bombed the target from 16,000ft (4,870m) despite bad weather conditions prevailing. Similar

The 'Wops' football team, 148 Squadron, Brindisi. 'George' is fifth from left.







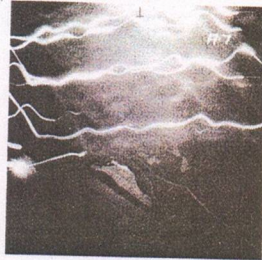
A briefing - possibly for the Warsaw 'op'. Harry and 'George' are at the rear, wearing forage caps.



Chalking up 334 Wing's 'ops' board - note the multi-national nature of the 'customers'.

targets at Parma and Alessandria were also visited on occasion.

The squadron had now been designated as the target marking force for 205 Group and a great deal of training was carried out to this end. Many of the unit's aircraft had been fitted with new navigation aids and radar, so frequent and varied exercises were flown to familiarise crews in their operation. This proved to be a fairly unsettled time for 614, for on May 10 the squadron moved yet again.



Taken from 614 Squadron Halifax II JP107, flares over the target, the Iron Gates Canal (Danube), May 31, 1944.

#### ELECTRICAL ENTERPRISE

Many airfields had been established around Foggia at this time and Stornara to the south of the city was the new base. It was during this period that the crew lost one of its founder members due to illness. This was Pat Tall and in his place as flight engineer came Jim Leeming.

Another incident, which occurred during the Foggia era, was the episode

of the 'electrical enterprise'. At this time only the mess tent and admin buildings were lit by electricity, the tents which formed the crews living quarters were dimly lit by oil lamps. George decided to yet again display some initiative. Probably by devious means, he acquired wire, sockets and bulbs, tapped into the cable supplying the mess tent and - hey presto - electric light.

"Probably by devious means, he acquired wire, sockets and bulbs, tapped into the cable supplying the mess tent and - hey presto - electric light."

Supply containers ready for loading into Mk.II BB338 'M'. This machine was lost on a drop to Yugoslavia on November 5, 1944.







Supply parachutes on the ground, as seen from the nose of a 148 Squadron Halifax.

then decided that they were to be spilt up and George's service record shows that he was due to join 37 Squadron at Tortorella, Italy. However Charlie Hall indicated that he was dissatisfied with this state of affairs. He reasoned that his men formed an excellent crew; they worked well as a team and wished to continue to fly together. Sense prevailed and his request was granted. But, they were not to continue with 614, instead they were to journey south and join 148 (Special Duties) Squadron at Brindisi.

Nose-art bedecked Halifax II which had force-landed at Brindisi a day or so before 'George's' crew arrived.

#### WARSAW UPRISING

It was early in August when they arrived at their new home and at that time 148 Squadron was engaged in supply missions to Poland in support of the Warsaw uprising. They had suffered heavy losses in the process; four of their Halifaxes had failed to return from operations to that city on August 4 alone. 'Ops' began for the crew on August 12 in Halifax V EB196 'E' with one of these sorties attempting to supply the besieged Polish Home Army with arms and other necessities so that they could continue their fight

The crews of 148 Squadron who took part in the Warsaw drop - from 400ft - in August 1944.

"After our drop, as we turned to port over the River Vistula, the Russians on that side opened up with a lot of anti-aircraft fire."

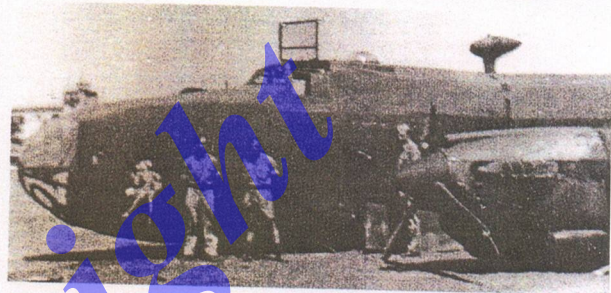
against the Germans. Charlie Hall recalled this first trip:

"On the run in, German light flak was fairly persistent and at 200ft or down to 150ft I was kept busy trying to ensure we had a street to drop our load on. As an additional hazard we had already been warned at the briefing that Warsaw cathedral spire was quite high. After our drop, as we turned to port over the River Vistula, the Russians on that side opened up with a lot of anti-aircraft fire. This was highly unexpected and

in view of the rugged nature of the terrain below.

"There was a quick order change when the coastline was sighted ahead, ditching in the Adriatic seemed preferable to baling out. Then it was realised that the Italian coastline could be seen, so another change in plan followed. It turned out that Harry's dead reckoning was a touch out, we were much further south than his original estimate and able to cross the Adriatic at its narrowest point."

Contact was made with Brindisi



most unwelcome."

However, Warsaw was left behind and a course set for base, but their eventual arrival on Italian soil was not quite as intended. Vic takes over the story:

"Our return journey was made over continuous cloud, almost as far as the Dalmatian coast. By now Harry had estimated that we were a lot further north than we actually were. Fuel was running low and it seemed we might not make it over the Yugoslav Alps. Charlie ordered us to take up bale out positions, not a pleasant prospect

but owing to strong crosswinds there they were ordered to divert to another base, but they never made it. More adverse winds and the elderly engines contributed further to the fuel shortage so; with petrol gauges reading zero, a forced landing was inevitable.

In this they were remarkably successful, managing to land in a small field near Lecce, the Halifax coming to a halt just a yard or two short of a stone boundary wall. Charlie and Jim then set out to hitch-hike to Brindisi while the rest dozed in the warm sunshine or kept an eye on the many





curious onlookers who had arrived on the scene.

For his expertise on this occasion Charlie received a 'Green Endorsement' in his logbook. As for the Halifax, later a section of the wall was removed to make a longer temporary runway and a considerably-lightened EB196 was flown out by a relief crew. It continued to serve with 148 until finally struck off charge on May 1, 1945.

On August 14 the crew set out again bound for Warsaw, this time in Mk.V EB179 'Q'. However, they were forced to make an early return when the port outer engine failed. Built by Rootes Securities at Speke on Merseyside in mid-1943, EB179 had already served with 624 Squadron before coming to 148 and must have been 'war-weary' by this time and it was struck off charge later in August.

Two nights later on August 16 they once more set course for the beleaguered city, this time in

148 SQDN SEPT.		Time out/return		RAF 00		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type/Serial No.	Pilot	Day	Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, etc.)	Flying Time Day Night
4-9-44	2005	HALIFAX 'C'	O'BRIEN	WOP	BASALT. AMCO. GOVINA (ITALY)	6-40
5-9-44	20-15	"B"	HALL	WOP	LUKOVA (YUGOSLAVIA) BRECHNIT (AUSTRIA) R.B.	4-00
4-9-44	22-15	"D"	HALL	WOP	TWILFIT (YUGOSLAVIA)	4-40
8-9-44	0005	"M"	HALL	WOP	BESTHESDA. (YUGOSLAVIA)	8-45
11-9-44	22-20	"W"	HALL	WOP	HOBLEN (YUGO) ARMHEIM (HUNGARY) ZIBLER (HUNGARY) S.B. (NOVA-SAD) (NICKEL AT)	6-40
13-9-44	11-35	"R"	HALL	WOP	AIR TEST	40
17-9-44	15-10	"S"	HALL	WOP	ROB. (POLAND) NICKELS ON ROUTE	10-40
20-9-44	14-50	"W"	HALL	WOP	DOVE (YUGOSLAVIA)	8-50
22-9-44	18-35	"E"	HALL	WOP	ALDSWATH (N ITALY) (NICKEL AT SAVONA)	4-00

Evac. Time 234.05000 / 1.5



Ray's logbook for September 1944 - codewords denoted 'Special Duties' drop zones.

one of the most enjoyable breakfasts they had had for many a month, they were able to continue on to Brindisi later in the morning.

### JUMP TO IT

While they were with 148 Squadron the crew gained another member, this was Phil Small, a New Zealander who became their dispatcher. His duty was to push out, through the well hatch, packages and supplies carried in the fuselage. On night drops this was a somewhat hazardous task as it was necessary to operate in almost total darkness. The uneven shape of some of the packages was no help, as they would often become jammed in the hole. Jumping on them would cure the problem but as a safety measure a dispatcher usually had a rope attached from the static rail to his parachute harness.

At Brindisi that George once more demonstrated his flair for improvisation. In an effort to put some variation into mess food he obtained a flat piece of masonry into which he cut a concentric groove. Next a coil of wire was manufactured to fit into the groove. This makeshift apparatus was then connected to the electrical supply. So, instead of the usual dry, stale bread the crew were able to enjoy slices of toast. It made a very welcome change.

After their trips to Warsaw the crew immediately became involved in the type of mission that was the main purpose of the squadron. These were operations on behalf of the Special Operations Executive to deliver

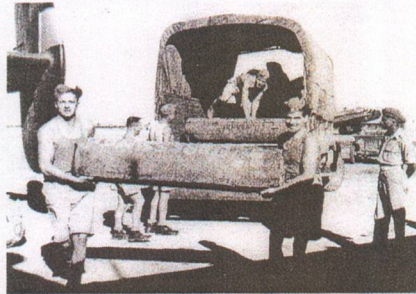
No.148 Squadron at Brindisi. Left to right: Harry Wild (nav); Jim Leeming (ft eng); Charlie Hall (pilot); 'Taff' Nicholas (bomb almer); Ray Ward (W/op) and unidentified.

Halifax II BB429 'V'. Again the sortie did not go exactly to plan. Fuel was running desperately short, and on crossing the Italian coast on their return they were urgently seeking somewhere to land. Vic, in the turret, spotted a landing strip no one else had seen and he immediately informed Charlie. The Halifax was soon lined up with the Pierced Steel Plank runway and without ceremony came straight in. This action brought Americans running and shouting for them to get off the runway but Charlie had to shout back that this was impossible as they were right out of fuel. A tractor was then quickly produced and they were towed off to the side. Operations, which they had so rudely interrupted, were then able to resume.

They had made their emergency landing at Madna south of Termoli

then home to the 52nd Fighter Group, USAAF. Although their unscheduled arrival had caused a temporary hold up to the squadron's take-off for an early morning mission they were made most welcome. Fuel was soon taken on board and after they had been given

Supply containers arriving for loading.







Sqn Ldr R C Pryor,  
OC 'A' Flight; Wg  
Cdr D G Hayward,  
OC 148 Squadron;  
Flt Lt K C Dobbin,  
OC 'B' Flight.

arms and other necessary supplies to partisans in enemy-occupied territory. In addition, on occasions, agents were also carried to be parachuted in. As an extra task, 'Nickels' (propaganda leaflets) were frequently dropped at selected locations en route.

For the remainder of August and through September the crew flew night 'ops'. Many were to locations in Northern Italy and Yugoslavia, but they also included odd trips to Austria, Crete, Hungary and yet another long haul to a location in Poland near Krakow.

The same pattern continued throughout October and November but with one major change, all the sorties were flown in daylight. Their destination in all instances was to coded locations, with names such as Townbucket (Greece), Cuckold, Gabriel, Gilgal and Icarus (Yugoslavia) and Cameron and Ellis in Yugoslavia.

As with the crews in the UK, leave was allocated to squadron personnel when at all possible. It provided a welcome relief from the strain of operations. The crew were able to take advantage of this and enjoyed periods

of relaxation in Sicily at Toarmina and at Sorrento. George was rested from operations during December and early January 1945 and when missions were resumed he flew for a time with other pilots of the squadron. Flights with Charlie Hall in charge began again towards the end of February.

From then and throughout March the mixture was as before, but with occasional night drops thrown in. During this period only one hiccup is recorded. This occurred after a night sortie to 'Ely' in Czechoslovakia in Mk.II JP229 'B'. A fuel shortage again became a problem, making an emergency landing necessary, this time at Foggia Main.

#### FINAL ENTRY

Only one 'op' was flown in April. This was on the 2nd, a daylight trip of 6 hours 30 minutes in Halifax VLL920 'N', to a location codenamed 'Crayon' in Yugoslavia. The significance of this sortie was that it was to be George's final operation, for he, along with the rest of the original crew, had completed a second tour and it became the final entry in his flying log. Throughout his period of

Left to right: Charlie Hall; Flt Lt Black (the Intelligence Officer?); 'Taff' Nicholas; Harry Wild. Behind is Halifax II JP227, which was destroyed when the undercarriage collapsed while avoiding a Dakota at Brindisi, February 23, 1945.



service with 614 and 148 Squadrons, George, now a Warrant Officer, had received high assessments and was considered above average as a wireless operator.

The original crew members, now time-expired, left 148 Squadron in mid-April 1945 bound first for 56 Personnel Transit Camp, Naples. From here the British element returned by ship to the UK. For Vic though it was a slightly different story, he returned to Australia by a more roundabout route. First he went to Cairo but while awaiting transport he was sent to England and returned home via the Panama Canal.

By the time Ray arrived home, World War Two in Europe was at an end and many aircrew were now surplus to requirements. Ray appears to have been one of these. For the remaining months of his service he did a fair amount of changing stations. First he went to 1 Personnel Dispersal Centre, then on to 2 Radio School, Compton Bassett, Wilts, then to the Empire Central Flying School, Hullavington, Wiltshire, before being sent to 2 Personnel Dispersal Centre.

From there it was to 91 (Bomber) Group Headquarters, Abingdon, Oxford. Finally his 'demob' number came up and he departed to 100 Personnel Dispersal Centre on a Class 'A' release, which became effective on September 30, 1946.

Although he had aspirations to become an electrician, that was not to be. He had married his long-term girlfriend shortly after returning from overseas and now had a wife and a family to consider so, in due course, he returned to his pre-war trade in boot and shoe manufacture.

His great adventure over, the rest of his life was fairly uneventful. Unfortunately he did not live to a great age but passed away peacefully, after illness, in 1984 aged 61.

As a postscript, in later years Vic Murphy attempted to get back in touch with the old crew. In this he was successful and he managed to make contact with all except George, who had died, and 'Taff'. The rest he was able to meet up with on a visit to the UK in 1990.

Today Charlie and Vic are still with us. Both remember George with some affection recalling the calm and thoroughly efficient way in which he carried out his duty as a wireless operator, his dry sense of humour and ingenuity on many occasions. To both of them I am indebted for allowing me to delve into their memories of their past exploits and for enabling me to put some meat on the bare bones of an airman's wartime logbook.