

## ACCOUNT OF ESCAPE OF

1397971 Sgt. THOM, Norman, 100 Sqn., Bomber Command, R.A.F.

Captured: Near VITTEL, 28 Apr 44.

Escaped: NANCY Military Barracks, 30 Apr 44.

Date of Birth: 2 Oct 23,

Peacetime Profession: Process engraver.

R.A.F. Service: 3 years.

Private Address: 22, The Close, HARPENDEN, Herts.

I was a member of the crew of a Lancaster aircraft which took off from GRIMSBY, on 27 Apr 44 at 2000 hrs.

Our target was FRIEDRICHSHAFEN. The target was bombed. On the return journey in the vicinity of VITTEL (LORRAINE) (FRANCE, 1:250,000, Sheet 17, Z 65) the aircraft was hit by Flak. At 0345 hrs (28 Apr) the pilot ordered us to bale out, as the aircraft was enveloped in flames.

I donned my parachute, but the aircraft went immediately into a dive from 15,000 ft, developing into a starboard spin. At about 2000 ft the aircraft exploded, and I, was blown clear. On arriving on the ground I hid the parachute, harness, etc. by burying, and broke open my aids box. Hiding on a hilltop 100 yds from the scene of the crash I distributed them in my boots, pockets, etc. I walked into a small village, evading some Germans in cars, but walked into a patrol of four Germans on the outskirts of the village.

They took me to the scene of the crash, where I found six bodies of the crew. I was searched and all except a compass and a few francs were taken from me.

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After three hours I was escorted to VITTEL and remained until 1830 hrs the same day.

I was questioned as to crew, aircraft, target, base, etc. I gave only my name, number and rank.

I was then taken by train to NANCY Military Barracks, on the border of ESSAY airfield, where on arriving I was placed in a cell. I slept most of the following night and day. A guard brought me soup at 0900, 1500 and 2100 hrs. The guard rolled cigarettes for me at those times, sitting on cell seps whilst I drank the soup. At 1800 hrs on 30 Apr I tried the cell bars, but they were too firmly embedded in concrete. Whilst visiting the latrine at mealtimes I observed that the cell door was padlocked on the outside.

On the night of 30 Apr the guard rolled cigarettes as usual. Whilst he was doing so I stuck him from behind with an iron poker (an obsolete cell window bar) procured from the stove. He was senseless after the first blow, but a few strikes more made certain. I removed his revolver and threw it into the adjoining cell. I climbed on to the roof of the cell block and over to a flat roof, dropping into a garden just inside the low barrack wall.

I obtained civilian clothes from a garden shed, climbed a wall, and walked past a sentry, going due West for two miles, afterwards striking across country to an isolated farmhouse. I was given food,

clothing and money. Next day (1May), I walked to LUNEVILLE (N.W. EUROPE. 1:250,000, Sheet 9, Q 00), with my feet in a very bad condition. I rested for five days at a farmhouse, and was given food during this period. On 6 May a Polish girl escorted me back to NANCY. I had my photograph taken in a big general store. After two days here I was given an identity card, and on 9 May went by train to DELLE (GERMANY, 1:250,000, Sheet K 48, A 47) on the Swiss border in company with the Polish girl. The girl returned to NANCY. After surveying the border for two days I crossed into SWITZERLAND (11 May). I left SWITZERLAND about 12 Aug with F/Sgt. HORN (M.I.9'S/P.G. (-) 2369) and W/O COLLINS.