

**Doug Hawkes's 61 days of The Battle of Berlin**  
**November 19, 1943 to January 21, 1944**  
**As a pilot in RCAF 419 Squadron.**



Flying Officer Doug Hawkes at the controls of a 419 Sqn Lancaster.

After the Battle of Britain, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made remarks indicating that Fighter Command saved the day; the Navy could lose the war. He said to the effect that, it would take heavy bombardment by aircraft throughout Germany to convince the population to defeat the desires of the Nazis, to put an end to the war.

I presume, it was decided then and there, that the concentration of the British Empire was to build heavy bombers, and bomb by night without the necessary fighter aircraft protection.

After World War I, when Canada was treated merely as a colony of Britain, it was to be understood by Britain that Canada would join to battle Nazi Germany on the understanding that Canada would have its own Canadian Navy, Canadian Army and Canadian Air Force.

In the early days of the war Germany had very strong military forces and over run several European Countries. It was such a concern that the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan became a big part of Canada's war effort, from which I graduated as a pilot March 11, 1943. Before graduation all students were interviewed and told of their future with the RCAF. I was to be posted to a Flying Instructors Station. I explained that I was single, with no emotional connections and would prefer to go overseas. "We will grant that if you like, but it will affect your commission."

I reported to a Manning Depot in Halifax on March 28, 1943, as a Sergeant in rank.

With training in Ansty, Shrewsbury, Welsbourne, I was posted for Operational Training on a Wellington. On September 1, a former friend from Calgary, F/Lt Bill McGuffin sent us out with a war load weight, including one live bomb, with a navigational instructor to strike a sunken ship in the Hull Estuary.

On entering the aircraft PIO Sutherland DFC said, "I have just finished a tour of ops without a scratch, and I want to come back from this trip in the same condition." And he did. It was after we crash landed.

We had taken off, with a ceiling of 900 feet. We were climbing at about 2,000 feet in cloud when the port motor stopped and could not be restarted. The propeller could not be feathered, so as a result we were losing altitude. I got back to the former compass direction and broke out of cloud about 900 feet. Now to find a place to land. The farms were small and with the familiar rock fences we had to find an airfield. The first one that we came to was under improvement for heavier American bombers, with heavy machinery all over the runways. Then we came to Desborough Airfield a Service Flying Training School (SFTS), like the two in Calgary, under similar conditions, but I had to go in with only an altitude now of 300 feet. We touch the grass and then selected the landing gear up and scraped to a stop, heading for, a built up area. We all departed without a scratch, as requested.

My logbook shows that our crew graduated with Above Average rating.



Doug Hawkes (left) Edinburgh July 43

From there we went to Topcliffe 1659 Conversion Unit flying the Halifax II, heavy bomber. Records show that over seventy percent of all combat operations flown by RCAF Bomber Squadrons used Halifax II & V aircraft. It was certainly wonderful to realize that with the good flying training we all received we, as a crew of seven, were now flying a heavy aircraft. Topcliffe was unique in that all crews ate together in a common mess, to get to know each other.

One very memorable training trip was to fly to the English Channel and return by flying over London. We of course were warned that if there is a raid by Germany there would be a signal by search lights moving from horizontal to vertical. As we were approaching London, search lights came on and I realize immediately we are on the south and westerly edge of the London defense area, equal distance east and west, so we flew on course, because we did not see any sign of anti aircraft firing ahead of us. It was an impressive sight, far exceeding anything I witnessed on operations.

With 26 hours 30-minutes of flying a Halifax IT on trips of about four hours maximum, we were posted to the RCAF "Moose" 419 Squadron at Middleton-St-George, in County Durham, England, November 19th, 1943.

Prime Minister Churchill and our Bomber Leader Air Vice Marshall Harris, decided that with the success they had in turning Hamburg into a citywide fire, if we could do that to Berlin, we could end the war, with only a loss of up to 500 aircraft. The Battle of Berlin started the day before our crew arrived, November 18, 1943 ..

On forming Six Group for Canadian Squadrons, the RCAF requested to have the Lancaster as our principal aircraft. The reply was "Canadian Squadrons can have all the Lancasters that Canada produced in their own factories".

On the evening of November 21, I spent in the Airdrome Control tower, watching a fellow Calgarian as control officer. On November 22, 1943, as an observer, I joined with the crew of F/Lt. Hewitt, of South Eastern Saskatchewan, to bomb and return from Berlin. We were in cloud, from east coast of England, to 18,000 feet. We bombed the sky markers over the target with heavy flack, but no fighters observed. This was a second dicky trip, a learning experience for myself as a pilot. At briefing I heard the expression "A Maximum Effort operation." It meant to a Squadron Commander, that every aircraft that can fly with a crew available to fly it, is to go. In the book, Bomber Command War Diaries by Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everett, it states, " This was the most effective raid on Berlin of the war." 764 aircraft flew with a loss of 3.4% including a loss of 4.7% of Halifaxes.

22nd/23rd.	HALIFAX II	J.2192	F/Lt. H.A. Hewitt	P.	16.24	23.39	Successful. Target BERLIN with bombload as above. 9/10thms-1106
Nov.	HL.189	R.144238	W/O. Foley, C.E.	N.			cloud to 17,000 feet. Target identified by sky markers.
	"J"	J.2153	W/O. H.A. Lee	A/B.			Red and green sky markers seen in B/S. No fires seen, but
		R.120617	Sgt. Salaba, J.H.	W/O.			glow seen about 4.0 m. away. Set of sky marking seen W. of
		167313	Sgt. Edmondson, J.	F/N.			BERLIN about 7 mi. about 20.08 hrs which might have con-
		R.139638	Sgt. Griffiths, W.F.	U/G.			fused other A/C. H2S showed clearly, and made Captain
		R.140327	Sgt. Broadhurst, J.W.	R/G.			realize that sky markers off T/A were wrong. White flames
		R.131972	Sgt. Hawkes, V.L.	2nd Pilot.			but no N/P seen N. of BERLIN.

My second trip with this crew, for experience, was to Frankfurt for 7 hrs 35 minutes, with only 262 aircraft, mostly Halifaxes. 6.6% of all Halifax went missing.

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK							DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT	
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT							SECRET	
By 419 (R.C.A.F.) Squadron							PAGE No.	
FOR THE MONTH OF November 19 43								
DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT		
				Up	Down			
25th/26th Nov.	HALIFAX II HL 189 "JF"	J.2192 P/Lt. H.A. Hewitt R.14428 W/O. Foley, C.J. J.2153 P/O. H.A. Lee R.12067 Sgt. Salabe, J.H. 16731 Sgt. Edmondson, J. R.139638 Sgt. Griffiths, W.F. R.140327 Sgt. Broadhurst, J.W.R/G. R.131972 Sgt. Hawkes, V.L.	P/Lt. H.A. Hewitt W/O. Foley, C.J. P/O. H.A. Lee Sgt. Salabe, J.H. Sgt. Edmondson, J. Sgt. Griffiths, W.F. Sgt. Broadhurst, J.W.R/G. Sgt. Hawkes, V.L.	P. N. A/B. W/O. P/E. U/G. 2nd Pilot	23.10	06.54	Successful. Target FRANKFURT with 1 x 2000 lb. H.C., 24 x 30 lb. L.C., 900 x 4 lb. incendiaries. 9/10ths cloud, tops 20,000 ft., clear above. Target identified by red flares and green stars. Two sky markers seen well apart. Made bombing run on a third and bombed approximate position when this disappeared. Numerous well concentrated and some scattered fires seen. No opposition encountered.	

20/21 December 1943 our crew all attended their first briefing. The raid was a return to Frankfurt with 650 aircraft. After briefing my Flight Engineer, with a DFM to his credit, announced that he refused to go. I was ordered, "Go to your aircraft, and another flight engineer will replace him."

We did go to our aircraft VR-M DT731. While waiting for another flight engineer I discussed this aircraft with the crew that took care of it. "She always comes back. Just be careful of the gas gauges, they are not very reliable. Oh yes! a couple of the engines are losing glycol, so watch engine temperatures."

I cannot remember ever getting that type of a report in training command. I did not discuss the situation with Don Board, the new RAF member of our crew, a dairyman from Bridgewater, Somerset in England. I did not have time after introductions, because it was time to taxi for take off position. This raid was also a Maximum Effort affair. There were 650 aircraft, of which 6.3 % failed to return, including the 10.5% of Halifaxes.

20/21st Dec.	HALIFAX II DT.731 "M"	R131972 Sgt. Hawkes, V.L. R143004 P/S Fletcher, W.J.K. J25529 P/O F.E. Houston, R103819 W/O McDevitt, D.R. 1604784 Sgt. Board, D.M. R155285 Sgt. Bowman, A.M. R159331 P/S Beckett, A.C.	Sgt. Hawkes, V.L. P/S Fletcher, W.J.K. P/O F.E. Houston, W/O McDevitt, D.R. Sgt. Board, D.M. Sgt. Bowman, A.M. P/S Beckett, A.C.	P. N. A/B. W/O. P/E. U/G A/G	15.50	23.57	Successful. Target FRANKFURT with bombload as above. 4/10ths drifting cloud, tops 10,000 ft. Target identified by red spot fires, red, green and yellow T.I. Bombed red and green T.I. near ground. Many incendiaries around T.I., no real big fires or explosions seen. Smoke rising as A/C left T/A. Three lots of red T.I. seen, later followed by two lots of green T.I., indicating FF7 early.	A.1166
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29/30 December 1943 was the second raid for the crew. Nothing had been done to the aircraft to improve its condition that frustrated me as 'the skipper. Our target was Berlin but our track took us towards Magdeberg. We tried to avoid predicted flak and found us in the defense area of Leipzig. Petrol consumption appeared high, and we were a few minutes late. We boomed on Berlin, but unloaded our bombs on the time designated. We headed west, hopefully bombing close enough to do some damage. All of a sudden we were approaching the flack of Hanover, so we turned to starboard go around the flack.

An enemy fighter ME 109 attacked us and missed. Concerned for our aircraft we landed in Coltishall, a 24 hour a day, emergency station. The next day we flew back to base, and no questions asked.

DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	DETAILS		REMARKS	
				Up	Down		
29/30th Dec.	HALIFAX II DT. 731 "M"	R131972	Sgt. Hawkes, V.L.	P.	16.20	23.46	Successful. Target BERLIN with 2 x 1,000 lb. M.C., 24 x 30 lb. L.O., 900 x 4 lb. incendiaries. 10/10ths cloud, tops 15,000 ft. Bombed on E.T.A. 20.10 hrs., bright white glow lasting five mins. where bombs hit. Red orange glow from BERLIN visible. Spoof attack at MAGDEBURG seen, A/C flew over LEIPZIG endeavouring to avoid flak. A/C late on target doing this, so bombed E.T.A. Turned N. for 11 mins. attempting to get back on homeward track and did so, landed at COLTISHALL due to petrol shortage. Seven winds broadcast received which were of great help.
		R143004	F/S Fletcher, W.J.K.	N.			
		J22529	F/O F.E. Howison	<del>W/O</del> A/B			
		R103819	W/O McDevitt, D.R.	<del>W/O</del> W/O			
		1604784	Sgt. Board, D.M.	<del>W/O</del> P/E			
R155285	Sgt. Bowman, A.M.	M/G					
R159331	F/S Beckett, A.C.	R/G					
29/30th	HALIFAX II	R110962	F/S MacLean, E.H.	P.			

On 21/22 January, 1944, our Rear Gunner Art Beckett reported to sick parade so we were lucky to get Wilf Barnes, a dairyman from Ontario, who we found out later, had two enemy aircraft to his credit with no award to recognize his skill. Our former aircraft VR-M did not return from a raid in which 8.3% of Halifaxes were missing. I was asked by the Flight Commander Hugh Dyer to pack the possessions of Hopkins, the skipper.

In packing his gear there was a packet of matches, which I pocketed, as worthless. These I returned to Hopkins, a few days later, a fellow POW, who flew VR M to it's demise the night before.

Returning to the flight office, I learned we were on ops that night. My crew was rounded up and took VR-D JD420, for a flight test. At least the ground crew did not warn me of any malfunctioning parts. The target was Magdeberg, another Deep-into-Germany target. We set off feeling at least we have an aircraft that is serviceable. Just before we reached the enemy coast Don McDevitt, from Hughenden, AB., our Wireless Operator announced that he had lost all contact and communication. Just before that, John Fletcher of Hatzic BC, navigator, announced a fix on a radar signal called "G". We were always reminded with problems arising; just continue on with your flight plan. This we did as ordered. The raid progressed and we passed the target with higher winds than predictions and were forced to adapt as best we could.

It was a clear night, so Luftwaffe fighters had a field day. We were off track from lack of information from Path Finder Force (PFF). We had bombed on PFF markers, but found out in Martin Middlebrook's book "The Bomber Command War Diaries" that an RAF patient in a Magdeberg Hospital, said that he heard bombs in the distance. We did not even raid the city, our target.. The world is round and even PFF was limited to help us, so deep into Germany.

Hoping we were close to enemy shores on the way home I asked John Fletcher, navigator, "How far to the enemy coast?"

"Two minutes" was his reply and the last word he ever spoke. Predicted flack hit us. Fletcher was killed with the flack blast that eliminated two port engines. The Bomb Aimer Frank Houison of Hamilton, was hit in the shoulder, I was hit in the upper arm. My Engineer Don Board helps me feather the propellers, and return to level flight. We soon determined on January 21/22 it was hopeless to try to cross open water for hours, so I gave the command to abandon the aircraft. We were 1 of 55 which included 35 obsolete Halifax II and V, shot down that night and 1 of 469 missing in the first 61 days of the Battle of Berlin. It was the second last raid of Halifax II to penetrate German air space.

Reflecting on the Halifax II aircraft, it should never have been used on Deep- Into- Germany targets. They were obsolete. On take off, the difference between climbing and stalling was only four miles per hour. In cruising the difference was only twenty miles per hour. At 419 Squadron our aircraft was stripped of mid-upper-gunner equipment. Our Mid-Upper-Gunner, Alan Bowman from the Detroit, Michigan area had to lay on his stomach to watch for any German fighters attacking from below.

It is stressful for a pilot to abandon an aircraft with even an airman said to be dead. We were at least over land. Six of the seven crew became Prisoners of War and returned to our homes at the end of the war

21/22nd	HALIFAX II	R.131972	Sgt. Hawkes V.L.	P.	17.46	--	This A/C took off to attack MAGDEBURG with bombload as above, since which time nothing has been heard from it and its loss must be presumed to be due to enemy action.
Jan.	JD.420	R.143004	P/Sgt. Fletcher W.J.K.	B.			
	"D"	I.25529	P/O. F.E. Houison	A/B			
		R.103819	W/O. McDevitt D.B.	V/O			
		160785	Sgt. Board D.M.	P/B			
		R.155285	Sgt. Bowman A.M.	U/G			
		R.130395	W/O. Barnes W.H.	B/O			

21st January.	14 aircraft were detailed to attack MAGDEBURG. There was one early return, "V" - pilot P/S McNary with his port inner engine u/s. Unfortunately two aircraft were missing from this operation - P/S Hawkes in "D" on his 5th sortie and P/L Hermitage in "E" on his 3rd sortie.		A.1224 to A.1236
	S/Ldr. Hamber, Flt. Commander of "B" Flight, had a rough time in "T" returning with 85 flak holes in his aircraft but, fortunately, no one was injured although there were several narrow escapes.		B.15 B.16
	All planes were diverted on return, 8 landing at LAKEBEACH, 1 at HILLSHALL, 1 at ROTTING COMMON and 1 at TUDENHAM.		
	Those crews not engaged in this operation continued with the work in the new crew room.		

After February 19th, 1944, 1944 Canadian Squadrons abandoned the use of Halifax II and V, and by April 1, 1944 were replaced with Canadian made Lancaster Bombers and the Halifax III with 400-horse power more for each engine and a seven-foot wider wing- span. The comparison of losses is remarkable. In the Battle of Berlin 920 bombers were lost with 7 aircrew members, therefore approximately 6400 failed to return. About 12% survived as pows. My total time as a pilot was 501 hours, with the rank of Sergeant..



A Battle of Berlin crew, flying a Halifax II, Series V on 419 Squadron of the RCAF, at Middleton St. George

John Fletcher, Nav. V.L. Doug Hawkes, Pilot, Frank Houison, B/A. Donald Board F/Eng.  
Don McDevitt, WAG, Art Beckett, R/G, Allan Bowman, M/U/G



"Johnny" Fletcher

+

Jan. 21/44...



"Doug" Hawkes



"Frank" Horison

The crew of

D-D-O-G



"Don" McDevitt



"Milt" Barnes



"Don" Board



"Al" Bowman

Bowman  
Feb. 22/45

After his capture, Doug was briefly sent to Stalag Luft III, famous for "The Great Escape". He penned the following letter home soon afterwards.

STAMMLAGER LUFT 111

FEB 1944

DEAR FOLKS&AUDREY

EVER SINCE I LEFT SCHOOL MY LIFE HAS BEEN ONE EXPERINCE AFTER ANOTHER AND SO FAR IT'S JUST LIKE ANOTHER HOLIDAY IN THE ROUGH.

LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.

IN CASE RED + TOLD YOU I WAS WOUNDED. ILL PUT YOU RIGHT. I HAD ONE SMALL FLAK SCRATCH THAT AMOUNTED TO NOTHING. UNFORTUNALETY POOR OLD FLECTCHER MY NAVIGATOR WAS KILLED. ALL OTHERS ARE 100% O.K. AND I'LL RETURN AFTER THIS WAR IN PERFECT HEALTH AND EXTRA WEIGHT.

WE HAVE MARVELOUS FACILITIES FOR SPORT, DRAMA, AND EDUCTION. WE HAVE A VERY ENTERTAINING DRAMA SHOW HERE.

CIGARETTES WILL BUY MANY ARTICLES SO PLEASEW GET SOME ROLLING SOON AND OFTEN. ANYBODY CAN WRITE BUT MY CORRESPONDENCE IS LIMITED. PLEASE WRITE PTE FOR ME AND SHARE LETTERS WITH AUDREY.

TELL MURRAY I MANGED JUST IN TIME TO DELIVER ROSS'S PARCEL, BUT I DON'T THINK IT WAS APPRECIATED (A Bomb for Berlin labelled *To Nazi Doug*).

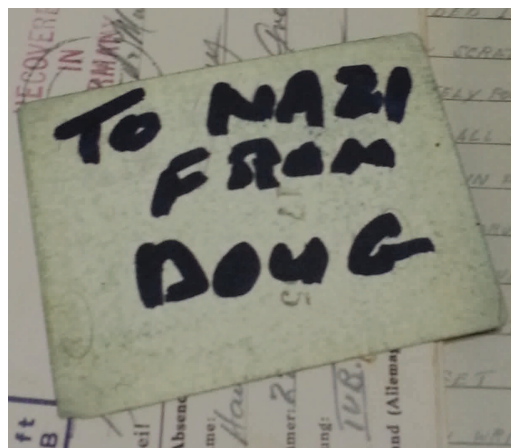
FOR BREAKFAST WE HAD TOAST, JAM, CORN BEEF, COFFEE. FOR LUNCH CREAMED SALMON ON TOAST SOUP &TEA AND LOOKING FORWARD TO FRIED POTATOES & SPAM WITH COFFEE & RAISON PUDDING THANKS TO RED + AND GERMAN RATIONS.

WE DO EAT WELL, NO WORK, NO PAY AND LOTS OF TIME.

MY SINCERE LOVE TO YOU ALL AND AUDREY.

DOUG

(F/SGT, HAWKES, V.L.)



I became a prisoner of war and as normally we would all go to the Interrogation Centre in Frankfurt and then by cattle car to Stalag IVB at Mulberg-on-Elbe, about 85 Km south of Berlin and 55 Kms. north of Dresden, for about 15 months.

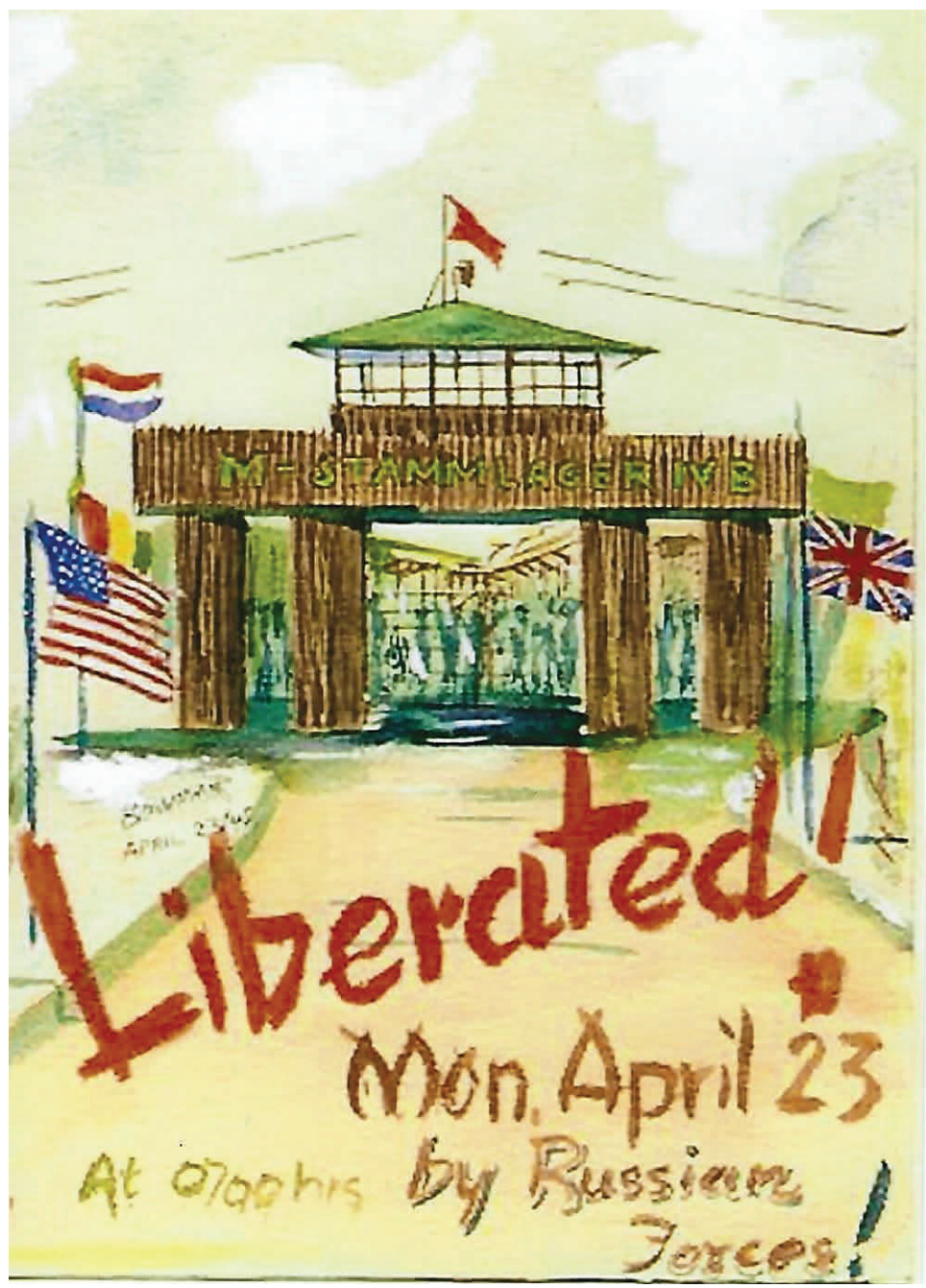
Russian Cavalry came on April 23, 1945 to liberate us. I roamed relatively free near our POW Camp, but soon marched the British about 10 km. with meager possessions, across a bridge of Russian Boats, where a few aircrew types took over a river side. small farm, with the wife of the farmer who was appointed as a willing cook. She was pleased to be there with British ex prisoners, who treated respectfully. After a few days on wandering about I found a narrow gauge train that was leaving in an hours time for the east shore of the Elbe River. I returned to my pals with the news. They joined me on a train trip to a bridge over the Elbe, into American Army lines on my birthday, May 17th, 1945.

In a few days I was in England, dressed as a Flying Officer in an RCAF uniform. In a few days I was with my brother, F/O Paul Hawkes at Topcliff, where I finished my training on four engine Halifax bombers, with the C/O none other than our next door neighbour from Calgary, W/C Allister Low.

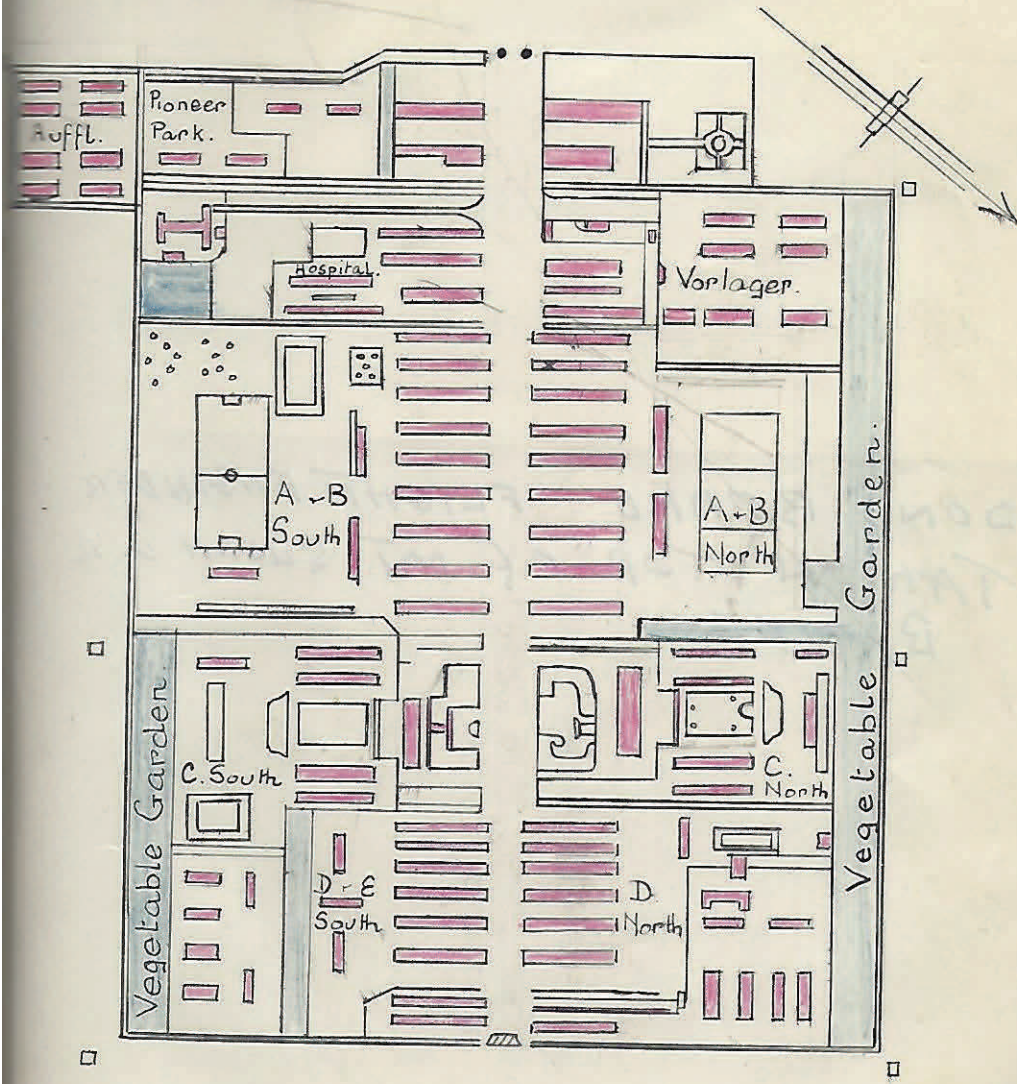
I sailed home on the Isle-de-France, arriving in Halifax. Standing at the railing of the ship, along side of Winston Parker, who commented, "This is the last day of the Calgary Stampede". That would have been about July 10,1945.



Russian Cavalry T-34 Tank liberating the POW camp.



Sketch Plan of Stalag IVB  
Muhlberg-on-Elbe 1945



X marks the spot - we never yet managed  
to be in time for a brew!

Best wishes  
Dixie.

*Doug born in Calgary, arrived back from the war to Canada in July, 1945 on the last day of the stampeded with Winston Parker of Millerville. Doug became a successful realtor, was president of the Real Estate Board and received a sixty years of service award in 2010. He was also an active member of the Calgary Chamber of Commerce and was always very community minded. Doug helped form the Glendale Kiwanis Club and eventually served as lieutenant governor for Southern Alberta. Doug worked with colleagues to host an international POW reunion in 1985 that helped inspire the formation of an Air Crew Association in Calgary. With the help of like-minded colleagues, Doug established the Memorial for the British Commonwealth Training Plan at the Aerospace Museum in 1995. It was in 1955, that the Calgary Foundation was founded by visionary community leaders like Doug as he vowed to return the favour of the generosity of the Red Cross during his years as a POW during WWII. Doug was recognized as an honorary life director of the Calgary Foundation in 1996 and was also given a lifetime membership to the Talisman Centre and claimed to be the oldest aqua-size participant. (Doug) Hawkes died February 2, 2012, at the age of 95*

*Doug's brother Paul Vincent Hawkes, died in 1997 at the age of 77. Paul served as an AG with 408 Squadron RCAF completing one operational tour.*

<https://aircrewremembered.com/hawkes-vernon-lorraine.html>

