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Roland Carlson

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

"Courage Englander"

Roland Carlson

A funny thing happened to me on the way to Bremen in the summer of 1942. Our Hampden light bomber was hit by ground fire and crippled. We were finished off by a Messerschmidt 110 night fighter. The port engine was afire and our navigator dead, when our pilot ordered us to abandon the aircraft. We knew we were over Northern Holland, and the time was about midnight on September 12, 1942.

The rear gunner made his exit, and for me to get out, I had to crawl through a narrow opening into his position and use his exit door. In crawling through, my parachute "D" ring caught on an ammunition hook and the parachute spilled into the gunner's compartment.

I gathered the silk and stuffed it into my flying suit. Grasping the spring-loaded pilot chute in my hands, I looked out the hatch opening and saw trees and houses about six hundred feet below. I was trying to decide whether to sit back and brace myself, or jump, when the slip-stream tore the pilot chute from my hands. The silk of the main canopy followed and I was pulled from the doorway.

I swung like a pendulum several times before I smashed into an embankment and was rendered unconscious. I awoke some time later and found I had broken my wrist, and my nose seemed to be all over my face. I rested for awhile and then buried my flying suit and flight boots in a culvert.

My escape kit contained a map, compass, and some high vitamin candies. I decided that my best chance of escaping the immediate area was to head east and then turn south. I walked eastward toward Germany, keeping to the woods and ditches the rest of the night. Before dawn I crawled into a dense bush and slept till nightfall. For two nights I moved south, sleeping hidden during the day. On the third morning, when I crawled into a hedge, I found I was within twenty yards of a main highway and German armoured vehicles by the dozens. I started to crawl backwards when I heard someone say, "Englander Kommen mit uns." I am not sure if I felt relief or not, my wrist was like a balloon on fire and my face was so badly swollen I could hardly see.

Apparently they had followed me for three nights, waiting for me to make contact with the Dutch



*Flight Officer
Roland Carlson*



"Propaganda" photo taken of prisoners of war at Stalag III B. The Canadian airmen were happy to pose for the photo as it provided a means of showing their families that they were in good health. "Rolly" Carlson is in the middle of the back row.

underground, who were, I suspect now, even then looking for me to render aid and hide me. The Dutch underground was most active and spirited hundreds of Allied airmen out of Europe during their occupation by the Germans. It was my bad luck to have been observed but I balance that against the fact that I did not lead the Germans to any of our Dutch Patriots.

They took me by car, back to the town where our aircraft had crashed into an apartment building. The two German officers, who flanked me in the back seat, pointed out some Dutch citizens who were preparing for the funeral of those killed in the crash of our aircraft, including our Pilot and Navigator. One of the officers spoke excellent English and called me a murderer and threatened me with severe punishment, and led me to believe that I would not survive. That was surely the lowest point in my then very young life.

Suddenly, as we sat there a young Dutch boy, of about ten or eleven years, ran up to the open car window. He stuck his hand in, made the "V" for victory sign and said, "Courage Englander — Hail Churchill." He then ran between two houses, chased by one of my two captors. The Hauptman returned in about ten minutes in a rage, muttering something I could not understand. I am sure it was something more than "Oh shucks!"

It took me several minutes for me to realize what that brave young boy had done for me. I sat up straighter and said to myself, "If that little guy can do it, so can I."

So began three years as a prisoner of war in lower Silesia. Three years of degrading surroundings, inadequate food, and wearing handcuffs as a reprisal against Canadian Prisoners of War for alleged atrocities committed

by our forces at Dieppe. Finally in the winter of 1945 we were marched westward in the dead of winter ahead of the Russian advance. One day in a severe snow storm, we had just left the town of Jena, when we passed a convoy of German soldiers moving westward. Their personal equipment was being hauled in large wooden wagons pulled by Hungarian and Russian women. We tried to share with them some of the food we had, but one of their guards smashed his rifle into the face of one of the women who accepted a piece of bread. That stopped our philanthropy. We were forced to step aside as the column passed. One woman, wearing sacking on her feet and wrapped in a ragged blanket, shouted to us as she passed — "Courage Englander."

After fifty-one days we had marched six hundred and fifty kilometres, often with no food for days, sleeping in barns, and in the open haystacks.

During the three years I often thought of this courageous Dutch boy, and that pitiful brave Hungarian woman and it helped to sustain me in my determination to be not less courageous, in not giving in to my surroundings. I was determined to keep my body and my mind as fit as possible to face the rest of my life when this horror came to an end.

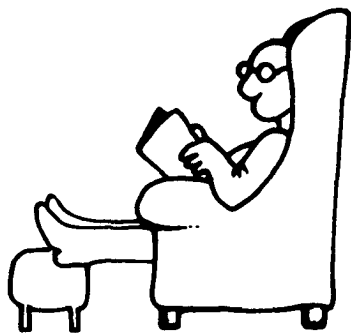
Even today and over the past forty-six years I often think of this boy and what he has become. I am certain in my heart that in his village or in greater Holland he stands taller and is among the leaders of his people.

The image of those women being used as draft animals has haunted me from time to time. I wonder how many of them survived and whether that brave woman, who risked a beating to shout encouragement to us, is alive and if she knows what her courage did for a miserable, cold, hungry, sick Canadian when she risked so much to say "Courage Englander."

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Photos supplied by Author.

Roland Carlson joined the RCAF in 1939 and was sent overseas in the Spring of 1941. During the war he flew with the RAF as a wireless operator/air gunner. Following the war, Mr. Carlson returned to his civilian manufacturing job. He retired in 1980 as an industrial engineer.



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