

Creative Writing 25 November 2020

The Crew - Jung's Archetype of Heroes by Lorna Ball

"Well Jimminy Christmas!, " I said to myself, "How in the world did I install my watch straps upside down?" As I reached for the pliers to un-install my watch straps, out of the periphery of my eye I spot Pinks drifting by my door. Five seconds later, Pinks drifts by again. Two seconds after that Pinks leans against the door frame. Trying to look wise beyond his years with a stance of nonchalance, Pinks asks, "So what time is it now?"

"Ten seconds after you asked the last time Pinks." I replied while still trying to re-install the straps on my watch.

"And what time would that be?" Pinks asks.

"Sixteen hundred hours." I replied. "Lots of time."

"I think I'll go around up the crew and we'll get to the Briefing Room early. Does that work for you?" Pinks said.

"Sure" I replied, putting down the pliers and fitting my new watch strap around my wrist.

Pinks wanders along the shacks and calls out to each of us. Pinks is Flight Sargeant Albert Edward Pinks, Pilot. Pinks is from Barking Essex UK. Then there is Sgt George Jack Low Wireless Operator from Dundee Scotland. Sgt Allan Bretherton Norris Flight Engineer, 21. years old from Lancashire UK. Sgt Patrick Alexander Esson, Mid Upper Air Gunner 21 years old from Shottery UK. Sgt John Breaker, Air Gunner 20 years old from Birmingham UK. Flight Sgt William E. Sargent, Air Bomber (Bomb Aimer) from New Hazelton BC, 29 years old. I'm William Allison Dixon, Flying Officer Navigator, 21 years of age.

As the crew begins to hop on their bicycles to pedal over to the Briefing Room, I suddenly stop and make an abrupt about face heading back to the shacks. Sargent yells out, "Dixon, where are you going? Are you going to get your magic pencils?"

"It's nervous poo time." I yell back. Across the North Yorkshire winds, I can hear Sargeant's voice jokingly taunt me with a "you know it's gonna to be a good operation when Dixon takes a nervous poo". The crew laughs anxiously.

We are a good crew. We had flown together for three months as part of the 1663 Heavy Conversion Unit out of Rufforth North Yorkshire before being posted to 578 Squadron in Burn North Yorkshire just five days ago. You can learn a lot about a person in three months time – who is the procrastinator, who is the stoic one (thank you!), who is the nervous one, who is the joker of the crew. Over the three months we've developed trust and understanding. But this is our first night Op (Operation) so there are more nerves than usual. Our plane is brand new so we can truly make it ours. The Halifax

MZ508 LK-N. Built by the English Electric Co. Ltd., Salmesbury UK in case you need to know. It is a plane without the scent of death.

We assemble in the Briefing Room to learn details of tonight's operation - the route out, time at turning points, time of markers going down, types of markers, route home, beacon codes. All the important things to know when carrying out a raid.

Briefing over we headed to the Mess Hall for a meal of bacon and eggs. The atmosphere in the Mess Hall was a quiet one with nervous expectation. Everyone was concentrating on their own thoughts of immortality and responsibility. Of course there were also the jokers in each crew trying to lighten the mood. It helped.

After our meal, we trooped to the locker room to get dressed. Knowing this would be a long night in cold weather we wore our polo neck sweaters with inner and outer flying suits. Esson, Breaker and Sargent, the gunners, wore heated inner suits. Lucky them! We stashed our three pairs of gloves (silk, chamois, leather), our helmets and oxygen masks. Pulling on our flight boots, we wrestled ourselves into our Mae West life jackets and tucked away our pandoras. Pandoras are escape & evasion kits containing Horlick's Malted Milk flavoured tablets, a tiny compass, silk maps and money. The most important thing to bring with us was the elixir of life -- the thermos flasks with hot coffee to keep us alert, awake and warm during the operation.

Twelve Halifaxes are to take off from Squadron 578, Burns UK at 2200hrs tonight. Trying to look calm and dignified amongst so many nerves and tensions rising up from the other crews, we waited outside for the bus to take us to our MZ508. We were each carrying parachutes. Being the navigator, I was also carrying my nav-bag containing maps and Gee charts- rolled not folded thank you, and pencils. I called them my magic pencils as these pencils are sharpened at both ends. The WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) often claimed we were walking Christmas trees because of everything we had packed on our suits. The Halifax is an unpressurized plane which in layman's terms means "darned cold with no breathable air". After doing our outside flight checks, viewing our bomb load of 13000 pounds, we climbed aboard to do our inside flight checks. I wedge myself into the Navigator's domain. Beside me on my left tucked into his cramped quarters was Low and on my right was Sargent. Above me to my left was Pinks and Norris. Esson and Breaker squeezed into their Gunner Turrets. "Have a good trip," said our ground crew. It was always "have a good trip". Never words like "See you later" as often this was a one way trip.

The Operation did not go as planned. Two Halifaxes ended up as no flights and stayed in Burn. As MZ508 taxied down the runway at 2224hrs, we all silently said to the plane, "And LIFT" to help her get airborne. We were supposed to fly under the shadow of night. Sadly, the weather did not go according to the plan of flying under the cover of

cloudy darkness. There were few clouds and the moon beamed upon our plane, exhibiting us like a bright shiny diamond showing the Luftwaffe exactly where we were in the darkened night sky. And why were the Germans in the air if this was to be a surprise raid you ask? Because one smart German controller ignored the diversionary raids and had his fighters circling close to the route of our main force. Consequently, the German fighters engaged us before we reached the Belgian border. The clear conditions allowed the fighters to pick us off at will like a shooting game at a country fair. We drifted off course. The winds were strong and the Pathfinders aircraft dropped markers in Schweingurt, not in Nuremberg which was our target. Oops.

Over the intercom, I remember Pinks yelling, "Pilot to Navigator, where are we?" To which, as I was madly measuring and looking through the Gee-Box and calculating distances, I responded, "Navigator to Pilot....well-ll-ll". We made it as far as Ermreus, just a few scribbles of the magic pencil away from Nuremberg.

We were Oberst Helmut Lent's 94<sup>th</sup> kill of his career at 0121hrs on 31 March 1944. With this being a night of few clouds and a bright moon, how could he *not* miss? He also had years more experience at fighting and flying than we did. He was known in the Luftwaffe as the specialist Night Flight Destroyer. He was a flying ace. There are heroes in war and to the Luftwaffe, Lent was a hero. To his family, Lent was the lost black sheep. His family had begged him to help bring peace in Germany rather than be a harbinger of death, but Lent had denied them and signed up with the Luftwaffe. While his family had forgiven him, they still considered him a black sheep and definitely not a hero.

When our plane dived back down to earth, I was the only one still left in the broken busted carcass. To this day I don't know if I froze or if I was determined to mentally think the plane to safety. It didn't work. We are the dead.

The German Soldiers who found our bodies told the townfolk to build coffins for each of us. My little black cloud followed me past the grave. The carpenter didn't have enough wood to make enough coffins so I was buried in the woods. Somewhere between the carcass of the plane and being planted in the woods, someone stole my watch. Good thing the watch had new straps. I hope whomever wore that watch would come to find inner peace. The living needs a watch more than the dead.

It took F/Lt George of the Missing Research and Enquiry Unit (MREU) three years to find my body. And the only reason that F/Lt George knew it was me was I have excellent penmanship. F/Lt George could still read my last name that I'd written on the inside collar of my shirt. My relatives to this day write their last name in their coats and boots just in case they are in an accident and need to be identified. In fact it is known to my relatives as "doing an Uncle Allison". I like that.

I was always impressed with F/Lt George's grit and determination in trying to find all of our crew and make sure we were all buried together. We live in the Durnbach Cemetery. Almost in a row. Together for eternity as the crew of the MZ508. I'm in Row 8 B 14 if you ever come for a visit. One WW2 Historian actually copied the call sign of our plane down incorrectly. For many years and still to this day, people think our plane was MZ505. Each time someone reads MZ505 for our crew, in unison we yell from our graves, "MZ508!". It is peaceful in Durnbach. The town folk and Commonwealth War Graves kept the place dignified and beautiful.

War isn't only about those who are in the direct conflict. War also affects those at home. My Mother kept my medals and Silver Cross in her bureau for years. Never on display because it would be a reminder that I was dead. My Dad would never step into a plane the rest of his life. Now that they are both dead and gone, my sister has the Silver Cross. Over the years, my medals got lost. My sister still can't bear to see a wreath as it reminds her of what she lost and who I never got to be. For decades after my death, on my birthday a bouquet of flowers appeared on the headstone that my parents had engraved in the Aulac NB cemetery. My family never knew about my girlfriend. They wondered who it was that each year brought flowers for me. But I knew. Her love for me never dimmed even though I was long dead. She never married but faithfully remembered me all the years until she became too old and crippled to go to the cemetery. That is love.

In any war, there are heroes. Each Remembrance Day we remember the heroes or frequently create heroes to remember. But I would appreciate it if people would remember those of us who were not heroes,. We did not view ourselves to be defenders nor champions nor rescuers. Yet we also were not cowards. We were just young men and women who answered the call to action to save and serve our country and King. We fought not because we thought fighting was the right way to solve problems but because we wanted peace and freedom for all the world. So when Remembrance Day rolls around again, don't be sad at our passing but rejoice we made a difference so that you have peace and reconciliation in this world of ours. But now the mantle falls upon you. How will you remember our sacrifices so that you become the compassion this world now needs?