



## Newsletter No. 39 – Where Silver Eagles Dare – June 2021



It was a simple enough thought. After “upgrading” my lovely Alvis Silver Eagle, I had a few parts that could go to someone more in need. One of these, quite a rare part, was the aluminium housing that held the starter motor in position against the engine. The previous owner of my car had managed to find a spare. I placed an ad in the Alvis Register mag.

I had almost forgotten about it when I received a phone call. The gentleman appeared elderly, but still with all his “marbles!” After a short chat regarding my car and his Silver Eagle, he decided he would like to purchase said item. We agreed a price, and the conversation continued. I should mention he had a typically antipodean accent, I asked Aussie or New Zealand? Aussie was the reply. I politely enquired how long he had been in the mother country and he said- since he came over as a pilot to help out in the shindig we were having with a certain Mr Hitler! I had to know more.....!



Turns out Alan, (I won't divulge his surname as he specifically asked me not to "advertise" his story - typical of his generation), received his pilot wings in the Royal Australian Air Force, and a few days later left for Blighty to help "sort the job!" He then celebrated his nineteenth birthday! (I think he said he is now 96). (To put this into perspective- think what you did just before your nineteenth)!

He then proceeded to mention that he, at first, flew Wellingtons on ops, and then progressed to the more advanced Lancasters. He was so matter-of-fact I felt totally humbled. As an aside, one of my grandfathers was in South Africa fighting the Boers, my other grandfather was in the trenches of WW1, and my dad was captured in North Africa near Tobruk and eventually escaped from an Italian POW camp clambering over the Alps to be interred in Switzerland for the duration. So I have a lifelong admiration for the courage of people of those days and often think- HOW LUCKY ARE WE?

I told him this and then said, sorry but I was not selling him the part. There was a pause and then he said - "Oh well." I then told him I wasn't selling it to him, as I was giving it to him - the part was his. He objected strongly but, quite emotionally, I said he was owed a debt that can never be repaid. Sounds a bit naff now, but actually, speaking to one of the very few of these amazingly brave pilots still alive left me feeling strangely honoured. I told him I would be very obliged if he could send me any photos he may have of him and his plane and crew. He said he would look some out if he could find them! And so, here they are:



As an eighteen year old in Oz - you can tell that because the sun is shining!



A photo of him at the controls of his Lancaster, his co-pilot the only non-Aussie of his crew, and a pilot, who was killed in a Meteor in 1948





**The man himself on the 8th May 2020 celebrating the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. As he said, he is wearing his WW2 uniform which still fits like a glove!**



**The crew taken just before their last flight (just in case)?**





**And finally, Lancasters at squadron**

What can I say? A few facts:

Bomber Command total aircrew -125,000

Total killed – 57,205 (46%)

Total wounded – 8,403

POW – 9,838.

60% killed wounded or taken prisoner

Lancaster heavy bomber - Crew 7

One of the most dangerous places to be during WW2

Life expectancy of a new recruit - 2 weeks

Lancaster first flight January 1941

Number built 7,377

Number still flying -1

After all these years messing about with vintage cars, I still am amazed at the stories that get thrown up by a casual conversation. There are some amazing people in the vintage fraternity, sadly a dwindling number, but Alan is undoubtedly the luckiest, and bravest man I have ever had the privilege to become acquainted with. I salute you sir!

ps. Apparently this year is the hundredth anniversary of the Royal Australian Air Force. Alan is the only remaining Aussie Lancaster pilot alive in the UK and he has been asked to attend the ceremony, probably to be held at Australia House. He says he may or may not go as he hates London. He kept saying he was "Just an ordinary bloke." I begged to differ. So keep an eye out for the celebration sometime this year - you may be lucky enough to see a very brave man!

Mike