

These Men Flew With Andy Mynarski

by Jim Kelly

As told to Jack Brickenden in the Winnipeg Free Press.
(Jim Kelly, a former Georgetown resident, is the son
of Town Clerk John D. and Mrs. Kelly)



Jim Kelly

All Canada remembers the act of personal heroism led to the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross... how young Andy Mynarski traded his own chance of survival on a dark night over Cambrai in a vain attempt to rescue his friend and crewmate as their Lancaster bomber plunged to the ground in flames.

It happened shortly after midnight. The date was June 15, 1941. Flying Officer Art de Broeyne of Montreal and his crew were on a mission over occupied France. The target was Cambrai. As they approached to let go their bomb load something hit the big bomber hard. They suffered a direct hit from the guns of a German fighter, a Junkers 88, and in a few seconds they were afire and falling.

The pilot, navigator, engineer, air bomber and wireless operator headed for the forward escape hatch. The mid upper gunner headed the other way. It was Andy Mynarski. As he got set to jump he looked toward the tail and saw rear gunner "Pat" Brophy of Port Arthur struggling to turn his turret into position so he could get out. It wouldn't budge. Mynarski forgot his own dash for safety and headed back toward his friend.

He fought his way toward Brophy and began tearing at the turret, fighting against the pressure of the plummeting aircraft, fighting against the twisted metal that jammed the turret, fighting against time. But when the burning Lancaster was a scant few thousand feet from the ground Brophy was still trapped. Finally, as the seconds ticked relentlessly away and at the urging of the trapped gunner, Mynarski struggled back through the flames to the escape hatch.

At the last instant he turned and saluted his friend. Then jumped. Mynarski didn't know it, but by then his clothes and his parachute were afire.

He dropped like a stone.

Six Survived

But what about the rest of the crew? All survived. All but Sergeant Roy Vigars the engineer, who lives in the United Kingdom, will be in Winnipeg Thursday. Even "Pat" Brophy walked away from the wreck unhurt. Ironically, even though the frenzied efforts of his friend failed to free him from the turret, it was the turret that saved Brophy's life.

When the plane crashed into the ground the rear turret broke open and Brophy was thrown clear. He even found his cap lying nearby. The engineer, Sgt. Vigars of the R.A.F. and air bomber Sgt. Jack Friday of Port Arthur both landed safely but were taken prisoner. They spent the duration in prisoner-of-war camps.

The pilot, Flying Officers Art de Broeyne, the navigator — Flying Officer Bob Bodie of Ocean Falls, B.C., and the wireless operator, Warrant Officer Jim Kelly of Georgetown, Ontario, and now Winnipeg, all landed safely and were helped by the French underground.

I first heard the story when I ran across Jim Kelly at a heavy conversation unit in Yorkshire. I'd heard that he'd been shot down and later, that he'd escaped, but I hadn't seen him for several years. After we'd slapped each other on the back for a while and bought each other beers Jim wandered back to my quarters. He perched on the end of my bunk and told me what had happened that night over Cambrai. This was his story:

Jim Kelly's Own Story

"I landed in a grain field and just sat there for a while... about half an hour I guess. It had all happened so fast I was still a bit confused. I roused myself finally and began to empty my pockets and bury the contents in the field. I wasn't wearing a revolver. Most of us didn't in those days. In the distance I could see Amiens in flames. The bombs were still burning and the searchlights were still trying to pick out bombers. Over on my left Arras was burning too. It looked different from the ground.

Notes Compared

"Suddenly I remembered my evasion tactics and realized I'd better not hang around there too long. I buried my parachute under some trees and began to crawl... across a road and into another field... they'd long beside the road for an hour and a half. Then I heard someone coming and snored back into a grain field to wait.

"Whoever it was wasn't carrying a gun and didn't wear a helmet so I thought I'd take a chance and investigate. I picked up a rock and called out.

"Luckily it turned out to be Bob Brodie, my navigator. I could make out his features in the light from Amiens which was still burning 10 miles away. We were pretty glad to see each other, and after we'd compared notes we set off down the road toward the dark part of the sky.

"About five in the morning we reached a village set against the road. We ran across the road and hid in a small woods at the other side of the village. It was cold and damp under the trees and our battle dress and flying sweaters weren't quite enough to keep us warm. We felt the cold right through us, but we settled down to prepare as best we could for our stay in France. We cut off all badges and rank identification but tucked them away in case we were taken by the Germans and had to prove we were not spies. Then we checked out our escape kit. Bob lacked not only his escape kit but his identification tags as well. And for some strange reason he'd brought along his bicycle pump.

"I had my escape kit complete, including handkerchief map, French and German money, one chocolate bar, cigarettes, a tube of condensed milk that had broken and spread over the rest of the kit, a file, a saw and several compasses. I was wearing my dog tags, and very fortunate it was too, as it turned out.

Like the Movies

"We waited till dark in hopes of locating ourselves but didn't dare venture out. Next day as we continued to huddle in the woods we saw several German soldiers pass on motorcycles. Both of us were impressed by how much they resembled the popular Hollywood version. In fact we still hadn't accepted the fact that we were behind enemy lines. It was too much like the movies.

Around dusk we saw some JU 88's take off and as we continued to crouch in the woods for five days and nights we found this was a regular routine. Just before dark each evening, off they'd go.

"We must have grown weary and a bit careless from hunger, because on the fifth day we were surprised by a peasant woman. We tried to talk to her, using our phrase books. She told us that we were near Verennes... that there were no Germans billeted in the town. She seemed nervous as we talked to her and she didn't lose much time getting away from us.

Hidden in Barn

"We talked it over and decided to wait till dark to slip away... but before the day was over the woman came back with beer and black bread. A 17-year old boy was with her. The bread was hardly palatable, as it had been made with wine instead of yeast, wine and the sweepings of the local flour mill. The yeast factory had been bombed by the British and wine was the best substitute available.

The boy couldn't speak English either but with the phrase book we learned that they wanted us to stay put. The woman came back later with the boys and led us to an isolated barn a bit apart from the town. It turned out that this barn was a safe place to hide as it was owned by the town's quilsing. We hid in the hay.

German Search

In the morning our friends came back again with a razor, cold water but no soap. We noticed that the razor was American. We must have been a bit delirious then, because at

the sight of the razor we jumped up and ran out into the town, banging on doors, searching for its owner. The poor people who answered their doors slammed them again in terror once they saw we were allied invaders. We cornered one poor soul on the street and began peppering him with questions in English.

"Just then a German staff car sped through the village. We weren't noticed for some strange reason, but it sobered us up but quick. We dashed back to the barn. We still hadn't accepted the idea that we were in France. In the air force there isn't the personal contact with the enemy that the army has. We take off each night from the same airfield and come back to the same field before morning. The idea of actually being in and walking about in a foreign land couldn't seem to penetrate my confused brains.

"In the barn we curled up in the hay again, for another night's rest. That night the Germans carried out a routine search of the district because they'd found our buried parachutes. We dug deep and waited and hoped. They stuck their bayonets into the hay and their big black boots stamped across the floor so close we could have grabbed them but they didn't see us.

In the next article Brodie and Kelly are grilled by suspicious underground leaders.

SEEK MORE SUPPORT OR CHAMBER WILL FOLD

The future of the Chamber of Commerce depends on more cooperation and more interest from a larger group of people, particularly merchants, according to James Linton, who has been a mainstay of the organization for the past few years.

Mr. Linton, who recently resigned from active participation in Chamber affairs, spoke quite strongly at a meeting in the Municipal Building Wednesday, when officials gathered to discuss the future. There is a real possibility that the Chamber of Commerce will disband unless more "working" members join, he said.

President John Gunn and secretary Charles Wray, who conducted the meeting, announced that in January there would be a public meeting to discuss the matter further. A speaker from the Ontario headquarters will be asked to attend.

A brighter side of the meeting was attendance of several merchants, who decided to work together for a more extensive program of Christmas decorating in the downtown business area. The Chamber made a \$50 donation towards such decorating.

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THIS IS THE FACE of the forged identity card given to Jim Kelly by the underground. It gives him the name of Rene Jean Lejeune, native of Corsica and resident of Amiens. Even his eye was changed.

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