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Canadian Aircraft Serials Personnel Information Resource

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**Willis, Robert
Andrew Grover (Flight Lieutenant)
Prisoner of War 1940-07-07**



Born 1920-04-06, Died 1947-08-16
Son of Grover Ithamar and Etta Myrtle (nee Beattie) Willis
Home: St. Thomas ON
Enlistment: 1938 London UK

Service RAF
Unit 99 (B) Sqn- Squadron (RAF)
Base Newmarket UK
Rank Flight Lieutenant
Position Pilot
Service Numbers 41766, POW 108

Wellington IC R3170 Bombing Cologne Germany 1940-07-06 to 1940-07-07

Wellington IC R3170 took off from Newmarket at 21:45 on July 6th, 1940. In very poor weather conditions the crew were forced to abandoned their primary target and, on their return, attempted to bomb Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam as a secondary target. Their left engine was hit with flak and the aircraft burst into flames. Bob Willis, the pilot, managed to belly-land the aircraft in a farmer's field in Haarlem. The rear gunner Sgt Sexton died in the crash but the remainder of the crew, P/Os Willis and Perkins and Sgts McArthur and Scanlon survived and were captured as POWs.



Bob Willis



Gerald Sexton



Paddy Scanlon



Ken McArthur

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Home Tools AIR Dawson - Flying... AIR Dawson - Flying... AIR-27-788-19.pdf

18 / 27

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

Appendix. R.A.F. Form 841.

DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.

From Jan 11 to Jan 11 By No. of pages used for day: 120

Aircraft Type and No.	Crew.	Duty.	Time Up.	Time Down.	Details of Route or Flight.	Remarks.
WELLINGTON						
Aircraft left HAMBURG between 01.48 and 01.50 hours in accordance with Headquarters No. 3 Group Form "No. 108". One aircraft failed to return (GARDNER - P/O. Wills).						
WELLINGTON - GARDNER attached Target 1248 to results seen owing to low cloud over Target. GARDNER attached Target 1277. Aircrafts attached to gun position of Flare Path. No results seen.						
GARDNER attached Target 241. Results not observed owing to cloud.						
GARDNER attached did not attach any target owing to low cloud.						
GARDNER did not attach Target 241 owing to believed failure of bomb release system.						
GARDNER was unable to locate any Target owing to low cloud and intense searchlight activity. Bombs detonated in sea owing to shortage of petrol.						
GARDNER returned to base at 02.45 hours owing to illness of second pilot.						
GARDNER failed to return to base.						
WELLINGTON						
P/O. GARDNER	L. TOWN. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER
P/O. Tallon.	Sgt. Swanton.	P/O. Smith.	Sgt. Swanton.	P/O. Wills.	P/O. Hutton.	P/O. Hutton.
P/O. Simpson.	Sgt. Howell.	P/O. Kellier.	Sgt. Swanton.	P/O. Payne.	P/O. Swanton.	P/O. Swanton.
Sgt. Fisher.	Sgt. Jackson.	Sgt. Williams.	Sgt. Wills.	Sgt. Jones.	Sgt. Little.	Sgt. Little.
Sgt. Graham.	Sgt. Goodson.	Sgt. Williams.	Sgt. Wills.	Sgt. Edwards.	Sgt. Lewis.	Sgt. Lewis.
Sgt. Goodwin.	Sgt. Craig.	Sgt. Murray.	Sgt. Gilmont.	Sgt. Jones.	Sgt. Price.	Sgt. Price.
P/O. Isbell.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. T. Swanton.	Sgt. Wills.	Sgt. Jones.	Sgt. Price.	Sgt. Price.
	L. TOWN. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER	P/O. GARDNER
	P/O. Swanton.	P/O. Wills.	P/O. Wills.	P/O. Wills.	P/O. Wills.	P/O. Wills.
	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.
	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.
	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.	Sgt. Swanton.

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ORB 99 Sqn, Hamburg



The remnants of the Wellington showing the ventral turret. In front of the wreckage Inspector Zauer talking to a policeman Leo Vrij

The Bob Willis Story

Pilot Officer Robert Andrew Grover Willis (click to go to a section)

- Enlisted 1938-11-25: London UK, age 18
- 1939: RAF Training: Desford, Montrose and 214 Sqdn Harwood
- 1940: 99 Sqdn Newmarket– 1940-02-24: Forced landing, interned in Belgium and escaped
- 1940-07-06: Crashed in Haarlem Netherlands
- 1940 to 1945: POW in Stalag Luft I, Oflag XXI-B and Stalag Luft III
- 1945: the Long March and Liberation
- 1946: Return to Canada
- References

This is a biography of Robert (Bob) Willis and a description of his WWII experiences as a RAF pilot and POW. It has been prepared by his nephew, Bill Dawson , based on family archives and extensive research undertaken by Aad Neeven in the Netherlands and Chris Wolfe in Calgary. I want to thank Aad and Chris for their dedication and hard work in helping to bringing personal WWII stories to life. (September 2023)

Early Life

Bob was born on a farm near Aylmer Ontario on April 6, 1920 to Grover I. Willis and Etta M. Beattie. He was the third of four children and the only boy. In 1924, the family moved to St. Thomas Ontario where Grover started an insurance business. They survived lean years during the Depression but the insurance business was a modest success. Bob attended St, Thomas Collegiate Institute and in his teenage years was a bicycle delivery boy for the Standard Drugs Store in St. Thomas.

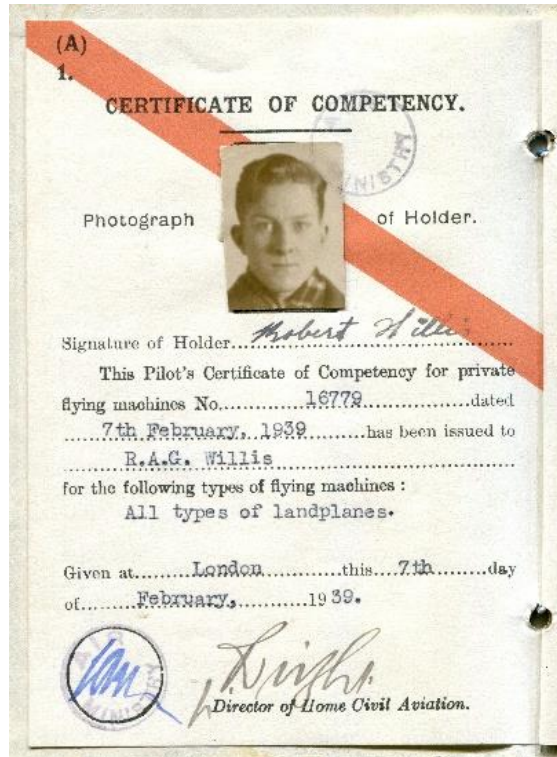


St. Thomas Collegiate Institute boys swimming team in 1938
Bob Willis Centre row 4th from the left

Unfortunately the Willis household was a very troubled one. In 1938, a year before the outbreak of war and unbeknownst to his parents, Bob, at age 18 in his final year of high school applied to enlist in the RAF. Over his parent's strenuous objections, he departed Montreal on November 18, 1938 on the Canadian Pacific ship the Duchess of York and enlisted in the RAF in London, UK on November 25, 1938.



November 1938, Duchess of York
"the last we saw of him for 6 years"



Robert Willis Pilot's License

1939 RAF Training: Desford and Montrose

On November 24, 1938 Bob was successful in his interview and medical for enlistment in the RAF despite the fact that he was colour blind. He was one of the last people in the group to be tested and, from those before him, he learned and memorized the correct answers for the colour blindness test. Bob was posted to Desford #3 Civil Air Navigation school in December 1938 and began his pilot training on De Havilland Tiger Moth 82A aircraft.

At Desford he first met Irishman Bill Thallon and they became close friends. Bob attended Bill and Maureen Thallon's wedding in Ireland in January 1940, they were in 99 Squadron and eventually in Stalag Luft III together. In March 1939 he officially became an Acting Pilot Officer and was reposted to RAF Montrose 8 Flight Training School to complete his training.



1939 – Bob Willis first on the left with Avro Anson

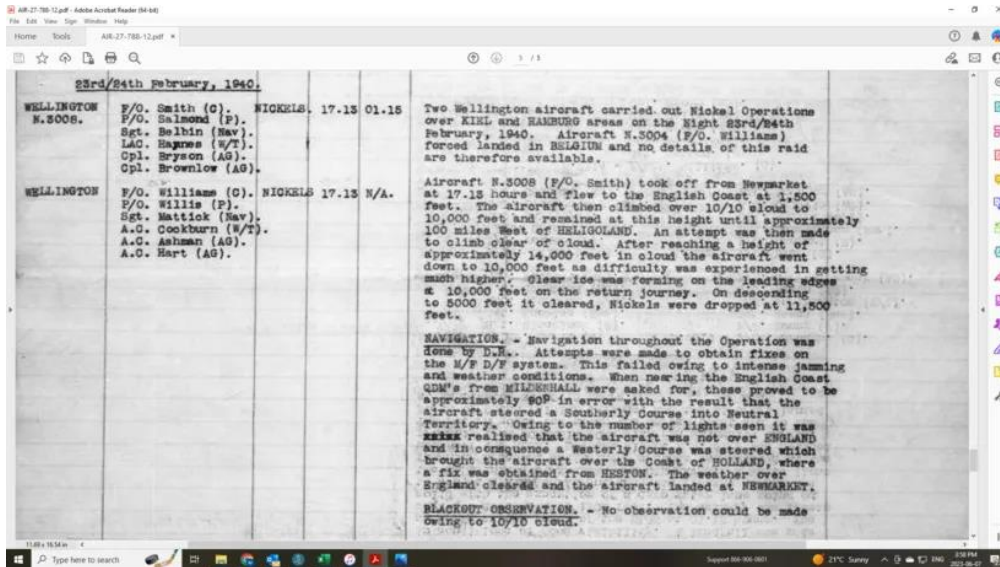
On completion in September 1939, he was confirmed as a Pilot Officer and briefly posted to 214 Squadron at RAF Harwell to undertake bomber conversion training flying Avro Anson aircraft, before ending up on December 18, 1939 as a pilot flying Wellington bombers with 99 Squadron in Newmarket.

1940 99 Sqdn Newmarket

Bob began a normal rotation of bomber sorties and saw enemy action immediately. He mentioned to his sister in a letter on January 1, 1940 *“I must bear a charmed life because, without exaggerating a bit, a burst of 10 rounds from a Heinkel (German fighter) passed behind me within a foot of my back. I know the old saying that ‘a miss is as good as a mile’ is considered a good saying. However I hope Hitler’s boys don’t cut the “miss” down any finer”* and on January 5, 1940 mentions to his father that *“I have been under fire three times and nary a scratch”*.

1940-02-24: Forced landing, interned in Belgium and escape

On February 23, 1940 Wellington Mark Ic N 3004 captained by Flying Officer O L Williams and piloted by Pilot Officer Bob Willis took off from Newmarket at 17:13 to undertake a “Nickel” operation to drop leaflets over Hamburg. The crew also included Pilot Officer J S Trotter, Acting Sergeant A R Mattick, Aircraftman 2nd Class W Cockburn and Aircraftman 2nd Class C G Ashman. On returning from Hamburg in heavy fog they became lost, ran out of fuel and were forced to land in neutral Belgium. At the time, the Germans had discovered a way to interrupt the wireless signals the British were using for air navigation, but this was not known by the crew at the time.



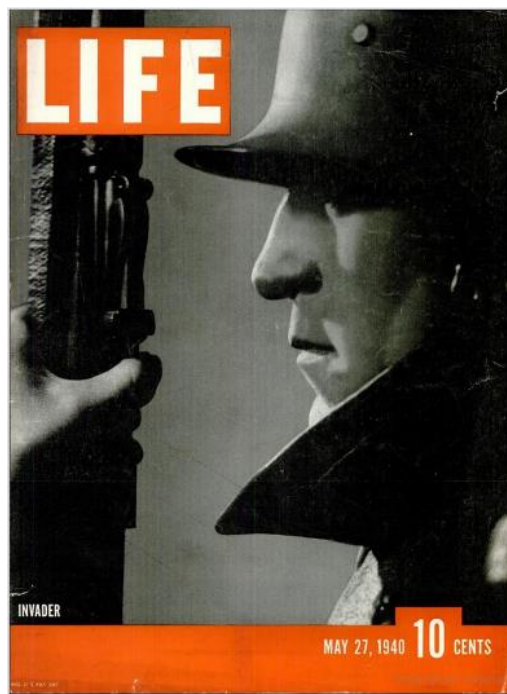
ORB 99 Sqn, Nickels

In a diary Bob kept during his time in Belgium he describes the flight being in heavy fog from 15 minutes after takeoff until they made a forced landing 9 hours later. Using dead reckoning they travelled to Hamburg by 22:00 and dropped their leaflets. On turning home they were unable to obtain a wireless bearing for 30 minutes after which they did receive a signal which seemed incorrect. They checked and followed the signal until 1:00 am but, as they were running low on fuel, they decided to drop below the clouds. *"We broke cloud with the altimeter reading -50 feet over what I now know was Holland. We were still receiving bearings of 190-194 degrees [incorrect] regularly. We became uncertain of our whereabouts when it was noticed that there was no blackout. Everyone thought we were most likely over Ireland rather than still in Europe. At 2:05am, having only 60 gals of petrol in the tanks, we force landed in a field near Gambloux, 30 kilo's from Germany and 80 kilo's from France. We destroyed everything of value and attempted to set fire to the aircraft by opening a wing tank and soaking a parachute with petrol . . . It will be noted that at this time we did not know where we were."*



Belgium News photo of the crash site February 25, 1940

They were taken into custody by Belgium authorities, treated very kindly but held in detention in Fort Borsbeeke in Antwerp and later Terlaenen Camp in Overvssche. During his time in Belgium he was promoted to Acting Flying Officer. When Germany invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940, Bob and his crew mates were released from detention and left to find their own way home. They made their way to Brussels, then to Paris, and finally back to Britain by May 16. Their trip from Brussels was described by Clare Boothe Luce in a dispatch that was published in the May 27, 1940 Life Magazine: *“On the second day of the Belgium invasion . . . I walked to the Hotel Metropole to see a newspaper man. We sat in the bar and presently a man in a sky-blue uniform came along. He sat down and turned out to be a Virginian . He had gone on a wonderful bender last night and he was so glad to be out of jail. Now he didn’t know how he could get back to Paris to report to his squad so I said come with us. So at 3 o’clock he met Mrs. Gibson and me at the Embassy and he brought his crew along. The Virginian was the gunner, the flight lieutenant was an Englishman, the sandy-haired boy was a Canadian, and they were all so very young. . . ”*. Boothe-Luce also described the event in her book *“Europe in Spring”* (Alfred Knope New York 1940, pgs 237 to 244).



Cover Photo of May 27, 1940 Life Magazine

In letters home Bob described how they drove to Paris in a large Cadillac, stopping in Lille overnight, with the Germans *“bombing all along the line there”*. He remained in touch with Clare Booth Luce throughout the war and she sent him parcels during his time in Stalag Luft III even though in a letter home he wrote about receiving an invitation to visit them but *“I did*

nothing to deserve the invitation ... In fact, I practically told her to her face that I thought she was a snob."

In the two weeks following his return to active service with 99 Sqdn Bob successfully piloted 6 missions and then was granted two weeks leave. On his return from leave he was assigned to be part of the No. 99 Squadron's contingent of the "Haddock Force". HQ BAFF set up 71 Wing at Salon-de-Provence in southern France under the code name Haddock Force. The intention was for Salon to act as a base for bombing targets in Italy. Three operations were planned against industrial targets in north Italy, however, the French authorities protested strongly and the first operation had to be abandoned when French lorries were driven in front of the taxiing bombers. The second operation, a smaller raid with eight Wellingtons, was against Genoa on 15/16th and the third operation took place on the night of June 17th with nine Wellingtons against Milan. Shortly after the third raid returned from Milan, during the early hours of 17th June, Haddock Force was ordered to evacuate immediately. This was the last British bombing operation from French soil, and on June 22 France was officially occupied by Germany.

By Bob's account "Saturday we went down to a French Aerodrome on the Mediterranean for a few days bombing in Italy. Well, we were there for exactly 54 hours and in that time I did 24 hours flying. We had to get out in a hurry when word came through that the French were giving in. I brought back a couple of bottles of Champagne but I came back with 140 francs that I couldn't spend because I didn't have the time damn it."

1940-07-06: Crashed in Haarlem Netherlands

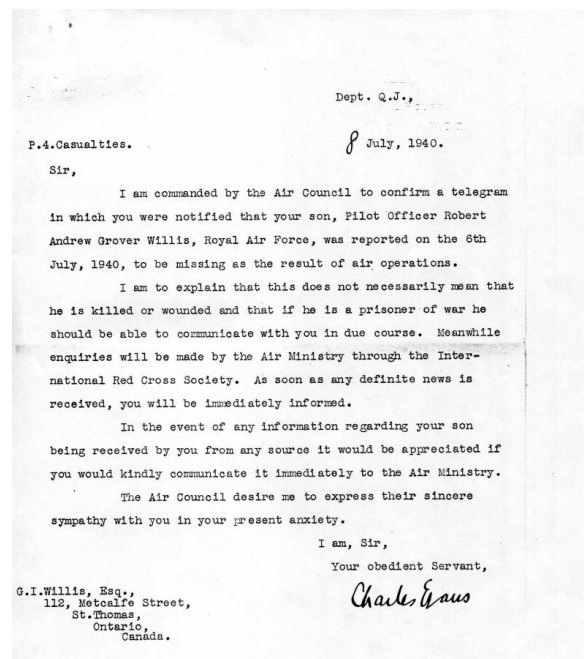
Bombing operations at 99 Squadron continued apace. On the evening of July 6, 1940 eight aircraft from 99 Squadron departed Newmarket at 21:45 including Wellington IC R3170 piloted by Bob Willis destined for Cologne Germany. In very poor weather conditions they were forced to abandoned their primary target and, on their return, attempted to bomb Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. Their left engine was hit with flak and the aircraft burst into flames. Bob managed to belly-land the aircraft in a field in Haarlem coming to rest partially in a row of farmers cottage on a roadside. **The rear gunner** Sgt Sexton died in the crash and subsequent fire, but the remainder of the crew, P/Os Willis and Perkins and Sgts **McArthur** and Scanlon survived. P/O Perkins's foot was injured in the crash so they split up with Bob staying with John Perkins and McArthur and Scanlon able to travel more quickly to the east. Extraordinary first-person accounts of the event have been documented by Aad Neeven in his book "Zonder Waarschuwing (Without Warning)".



Insert Link: Translated excerpts from Aad Neven book "Without Warning"

John Perkins and Bob Willis were invited into one of the homes but declined and remained sitting on an outside bench *"in sight of everyone"*. The van Voorst family helped treat John's foot and provided blankets and tea for the airmen. Eventually they were apprehended by the Dutch police and turned over to the Luftwaffe. *"After the tea the Germans forced the two men in their car to take them away. The youngest of the two, with red hair [Bob], tried to cheer us up by giving the thumbs up but was roughly pushed into the car."* They were initially taken to Amsterdam and subsequently to Dulag Luft near Frankfurt and Stalag Luft 1 in Barth. **McArthur** and Scanlon remained at large for a number of days but were also apprehended.

The Willis family were informed that Bob was missing in action late on July 7, 1940 but it was two weeks before they found out that he was, in fact a prisoner of war.



"Missing in Action" Notification, July 18, 1940

1940 to 1945: POW in Stalag Luft I, Oflag XXI-B and Stalag Luft III

Stalag Luft 1 opened in July 1940 and Bob would have been one of its first residents. His POW identification number was 108 so he was one of the first of the 100,000's of prisoners to eventually be held by Germany during the war.

Communications from POWs were strictly controlled and heavily censored and letters received from Bob during his years as a POW reflect this. They mostly refer to the overwhelming importance of packages from home which hint at the harsh conditions. His first letter home on July 14, 1940 is very brief; *"Dear Dad, I hope you haven't been worrying about me Dad because I'm feeling fine. I won't waste any more space now because I can only write three of these each*

month and four postcards. First of all here are the things I need if you can provide them. A couple of warm pairs of pajamas, winter underwear, socks (I haven't any), a couple of warm sweaters a pair of warm shoes size 7 1/2, moccasins if possible and a dressing gown for winter. In any other red cross parcels just send cigarettes and chocolate for the present."



Plate 18: A group of Canadian officers at Stalag Luft I in 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Bob Willis second row, second from the right

In November 1940 he wrote to his mother that there were 80 prisoners, including eight Canadians, at Stalag Luft Barth and that they spent their time playing bridge and reading. The prisoners were grouped three in a room with one meal a day served in dining hall and the rest rationed out in rooms. In February 1941 he wrote *"I can't begin to tell you how much I owe you for the food & clothes and all you are trying to do for me. There are about 20 other fellows here who also have cause to thank you because I can't see chaps go about in rags when I have so much in comparison. The English suffer the worst – nothing is getting through from England so we Colonials have to help."*

When Stalag Luft 1 was temporarily closed in April 1942 he was moved to Stalag Luft 3 in Sagan, Poland. Remarkably, at Stalag Luft 3 he was reunited with his close friend F/O Bill Thallon. They managed to bunk together and shared all that occurred until liberation 3 years later. Bob was moved again to Oflag XX1-B in September 1942 but returned to Stalag Luft 3 in April 1943. He remained there until January 1945.



East Compound Stalag Luft III

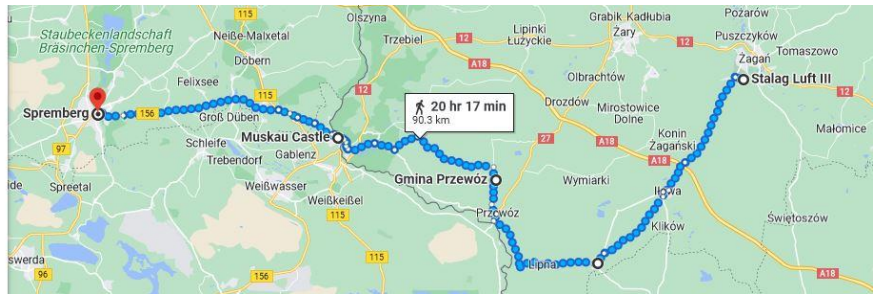
<https://www.bombercommandmuseum.ca/chronicles/prisoners-of-war/>

During Bob's time at both Stalag Luft 1 and Stalag Luft 3 prisoners attempted to escape, some successfully, but this was never mentioned by Bob following the war, and there is no indication that he participated in these activities. During his time as a POW he received two promotions from the RAF, first to Flying Officer (1940-09-30) and eventually to Flight Lieutenant (1941-09-30).

1945: The Long March and Liberation

On January 28, 1945, with the Russians approaching from the east and the Americans from the west, the German authorities decided to move more than 10,000 POWs from Stalag Luft 3 and other camps in Poland, 200kms west to Luckenwalde south of Berlin. It would be three more months of treacherous conditions before Bob, on May 7th 1945, would finally manage to walk across the Elbe River into American occupied territory and "so far as I was concerned the war had finally ended".

- Stalag Luft III, 68-100 Żagań, Poland
- Gozdnica, Poland
- Gmina Przewóz, Poland
- Muskau Castle, 02953 Bad Muskau, Germany
- Spremberg, Germany
- Add destination



General route of Bob's "Long March" from Stalag Luft II to Spremberg where he was then transported by train to Luckenwalde, Google Maps

After the war Bob began to write a narrative description of the experience but it remained incomplete when he died unexpectedly in 1947. Bill Thallon who was with him throughout this time, completed the narrative which he provided to the family.

Insert link "From the March to the End of the War" Bob Willis and Bill Thallon narrative account on the final days as POWs.

Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben

Kriegsgefangenen-Stammnummer: Stalag Luft 3

Name: WILLIS
Vorname: ROBERT ANDREW
Geburtsort und -zeit: 6.10.1907 Aylmer Canada
Religion: U.C.O.C.
Vorname des Vaters: GROVER
Familienname der Mutter: BEATTIE

Staatsangehörigkeit: Kanada
Dienstgrad: P.O. 4
Truppenart: R.A.F.
Zivilberuf: ORIV
Matrikel Nr. (auswärtige Dienststellen): 71766
Gefangenennahme (Ort und Datum): Haarlem 07.09.45
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet, eingeliefert: gesund

Lehrbild: 174 blond

Nähere Personalbeschreibung:
Name und Anschrift der nächsten Angehörigen:
Mr. A.J. Willis
111 Malcaine St., St. Thomas
Ontario Canada

Beobachtungen während der Gefangenenschaft gegen:

Proben	Ständige Befragungen (Ort, Partei, Ruhe, Choler, usw.)	Krankheiten	Verhalten	Arbeiten	Leistungs-Fähigkeiten
Erfolg	gut	gut	gut	gut	gut
Erfolg	gut	gut	gut	gut	gut
Erfolg	gut	gut	gut	gut	gut
Erfolg	gut	gut	gut	gut	gut

Kommandos:

Datum	Art des Kommandos	Rückkehrdatum
	Personal record taken from German files the day after our release by Marshall Konev's forces (5th Ukrainian Armoured Divisions)	

Inscription by Bob reads: "Personal record taken from German files the day after our release by Marshall Konev's forces (5th Ukrainian Armoured Divisions)"

On his return to England Bob was transferred to the RCAF and spent 3 months convalescence in Bournemouth.

Schonebeck on the Elbe

May 10th, 1945.

Dear Dad:-

Well I got out of the German's hands on the 22nd. of last month, at 6 o'clock in the morning, when a Russian Spear Head came right into camp,, I could fill about a 100 pages, telling you about our day of Liberation, and the time that followed up to date, however I think it will sound better, if I wait and tell you myself.

The Russians treated us fine, but would not let us return to Allies lines- but at the Elbe, the Yanks, (God bless their souls) took the bull by the horn, and parked trucks a little way from the Camp, and we sort of filtered out to them. I got here on the 7th. and boy what a cheer went up where we hit that pontoon bridge at the Elbe, we crossed at a little place, about 9 miles south of here, called Barby- I think.

I can hardly wait to get Home, but in the meantime the Americans are doing everything to make us comfortable, - the best of which is three square meals a day, without a worry whether there will be one to-morrow, and not worrying about who is going to wash the dishes. Another thing that does my heart good is that the local ex-Nazis keep this place clean for us.

This place Dad is an ideal one for a prisoner(ex) It is a great big factory with all sorts of machinery-most of which runs. I don't know the first thing about working the dam things, but am slowly finding out, and I am getting a whole of a kick out of it.

Bill Thallen did not get out with me because he had a job in Camp, looking after some men. Even I had no intention of going- it was just a spur of the moment job, because I was fed up, and it looked as if the Russians were never going to move us. Incidentally the Camp that I was liberated from was Stalag #3-A, at Buckenwalde, which is S.S.W. from Berlin, about 30 miles. That is the Camp that we finally wound up in, after our trek from Sagan.

We had a bit of fighting around our camp, after the Russian Spear Heads arrived in fact while out in the woods one day, I ran into 7 Germans, armed to the teeth and just about died of fright, however all they wanted of me was to tell them where the American Lines were- they wanted to give up, but not to the Russians and believe me I don't blame them- but that is another story, that will keep. I told the Germans that the Americans had retired to the Weser River, and that they couldn't possibly reach their lines, but they set off to try anyway. It might interest you to know that upward of 120,000 Germans were rounded up in our vicinity. We had two big battles near our camp, one about 1-2-miles away, and the other about 4 miles away. some fun, Oh Yeah, the worst of the lot was when a Falke Wolf 190 opened up in the camp with 20 m.m. cannon, I was a casualty because I came out of bed, so fast, I crashed into the stove, & then had about ten people on top of me.

Boy oh Boy, how I want to see you again, Dad, I've said it before and I will say it again, I'd almost rather do my whole prison term again, than these last three weeks, my real worry is that I know that you will be worrying about me not having heard anything since I left Sagan.

Always your loving Son,

BOB.

First letter home following liberation

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT—

No. 41766 Rank FLY.

WILLIS, ROBERT ANDREW GROVES
When name in capital letters and in full is written in the personal description, photograph and signature appear beneath, it serves in the
R.A.F.


Personal description of holder SERIALIZED

Height 5' 8" Build Med.
 Colour of eyes Blue Colour of hair Fair
 Date of birth 6.4.20

Changes in rank or appointment to commissioned rank are to be indicated below. All entries must be made in ink by an officer. Signatures or initials are not required.

New Rank	Effective Date	Reference of official authority for change in rank and date of authority
		TRANSFERRED TO RCAF ON 12th day of June 1945 AUTHORITY: AIR MINISTRY P.5226 GIVEN RCAF NUMBER C94076

Issued ISSUED 1952

 CARD No. 1950696

Issued day I arrived in England from France

Signature of holder Robert Willis / flt

Signature of Issuing Officer [Signature]

Rank FLY Date 14.6.45

RAG Willis RCAF ID Card Issued 1945-06-14

1946 Return to Canada

On returning to Canada he joined his father's Insurance business in St. Thomas Ontario. Unfortunately, two years later on August 16, 1947 while on vacation, he suffered a major brain hemorrhage at Elgin House on Lake Joseph. He was taken by ambulance to Wellesley Hospital Toronto where he died at age 27. The reckless, cocky 18 year old never had a chance to really make use the life lessons he must have learned as a POW.



Bob Willis in August 1947, days before he died

References:

Zonder Waarschuwing Jon Van der Maas and Aad Neeven, 1995, De Vrieseborch Haarlem

For "Haddock" Operation:

The Campaign in France and the Low Countries Sep 1939-Jun 1940. Pages 450 - 489

Royal Air Force, 1939-1945: The fight at odds, D. Richards. Pages 145 - 148

Haddock Force: operations at the Kew: AIR 35/323

Europe in Spring, Claire Booth, 1940 Alfred Knope New York, Pgs 237 to 244

Excerpts from “Zonder Waarschuwing” (Jon Van der Maas, Aad Neeven, 1995, De Vrieseborch Haarlem)

Starting on Page 33

Approximately 3:30 am in the early morning, Mr. and Mrs. Rosenhart were standing before the window of the Haarlemmermeer Railway Station located on the Amsterdam canal. Here Mrs. Rosenhart noted *“we were awoken by a hellish racket outside and saw a burning aircraft coming from the direction of Schiphol. It came in lower and lower flying over the Amsterdam canal. It barely missed the overhead electrical wires of the railway.”* Approximately 100m behind the railway, the Wellington hit the ground with a speed of 190 km/hr on a meadow in the Veerpolder. Paddy Scanlon remembered this moment like it was yesterday *“our speed was braked somewhat after impact. It had started to get light and straight ahead I saw a small dike with a row of houses.”* The dike Scanlon saw was the road named “Oudeweg” (Old Road) with street numbers 107 to 119. To the east was a lead factory owned by van Seyfferd. House number 119 was occupied by the family Prins, 117 by the family Vredeburg, number 115 by Mr. and Mrs. van Rooijen and son, number 113 by the family Ridder with son and daughter, number 111 was occupied by Mr. Eelman, number 109 by the family Bekooij with their daughter Riet and number 107 was occupied by their grandfather the 80 year-old Sijben van der Werf.

Most of the occupants of this row of houses were still asleep, however, 12 year old Riet Bekooij woke up early and noted *“I heard a high whistling noise and thought ‘here comes a bomb’. My bedroom was upstairs on the side of the road. I jumped out of bed to look what was going on. My bedroom was upstairs on the same side as the road.”* In the meantime the sliding aircraft lost most of its speed, however it was still fast enough to slide up an incline towards the houses and came to a stop when the nose penetrated the houses 115 and 117. The left engine came to a stop in front of number 113 and 115, the right engine in front of 117 and 119. Notwithstanding the impact of the nose on the home, the cockpit was completely intact. Paddy Scanlon noted *“I felt myself going up and down at the same time. Then came the impact against the house and plexiglass and pieces of the turret, where I was located, bricks and wood flew around and suddenly I was laying on my back in the living room of a house. The fire around the left engine spread unbelievably fast through the rest of the plane setting the house on fire.”*

Riet Bekooij was standing at the top of the stairs and did not know what to do. *“My mother was calling to me ‘come down as fast as you can’. As fast as I could I left in my blue night shirt with my mother and father through the back door of the house. On the patio adjacent to the garbage incinerator we heard the roaring of the flames. Some occupants ran in panic through the brook located at the back of the houses. For us the only way to get away was to turn left through the house of my Grandfather to go to the road.”* Scanlon got up as fast as he could and tried to leave through the hole in the wall but the flames prevented his exit. He ran to the right side of the nose of the plane where the fire had not spread. Ken MacArthur noted *“we opened the*

emergency exit as soon as possible after the impact. I climbed out first followed by the two fliers. It was impossible to leave on the left side because of the fire."



Riet Bekooij with her mother and neighbour in front of their house on Oudewag

The four surviving crew members began walking easterly along the road but P/O Perkins was wounded in the heel and could only walk with difficulty. They decided to split up and Bob Willis stayed with John Perkins and headed north while **McArther** and Scanlon continued east.

In the meantime Perkins and Willis arrived at the large factory walls of Conrad Stock and decided to hide in the factory. On the Waaderweg next to the factory were a row of factory houses for their personnel. The then twelve year old daughter of the welding foreman, Truus van Voorst remembers

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"I awoke from all the commotion outside. Downstairs I heard about the plane accident. I dressed and was allowed to go outside. It was a sunny morning. My father and neighbour walked in the direction of the factory. Myself and all the other kids who lived near the factory followed. We walked in the main entrance of the office where the sign with the stock was displayed. Before the sign, on the stairs were two men with their backs toward us, dirty and full of mud, giving the impression of reading the sign with all their attention."

One of the people nearby had, at 4:45am, phoned the Police informing them that two flyers were standing in front of the factory. As a result an Inspector went to the Oudeweg. There his immediate superior was finishing the details of the fire. He contacted first the Police Chief to enquire what had to be done. Only after that did they contact the German authorities present at the site. Hauptmann von der Bank had arrived at the scene and commanded the policeman to show him the place where the flyers might be hidden. Truus van Voorst continues her story.

“One of the two men was wounded and looked terrible. We took both home. My mother asked them to come in but they declined. Behind the house on the patio was a garden bench and they were sitting down. The wounded flyer was without shoes and we covered him with a blanket. My mother and grandmother dressed the wounded foot and boiled water for tea. After we had helped them they wanted to sit in front of the house in clear sight of everybody. We placed there two chairs. Shortly after the Germans arrived who ordered them to stand up, including the wounded flyer who was in a lot of pain. The flyers were searched and the Germans, with a lot of pleasure, retrieved a large gun belonging to one of the flyers. My father and neighbour were also searched, as well as all the kids who had to stand in a circle. The German officer was quite correct in his handling, however, the Dutch policeman behaved like a real bastard. To my great astonishment the wounded flyer spoke a kind of Dutch which I could understand [Perkins was South African]. He told us his wife and child, that day, would arrive in Britain and showed us a photo. The tea was ready and Grandma Hartemink, who was not easily intimidated, insisted that the flyers were given the tea, which the Germans agreed to before they were taken away. After the tea the Germans forced the two men in their car to take them away. The youngest of the two, with red hair, tried to cheer us up by giving the thumbs up but was roughly pushed into the car.”