

A SUPERB WW2 '617' SQUADRON 'CATERPILLAR CLUB' MEMBERSHIP, MEDALS AND DOCUMENTS GROUP TO AN AIR BOMBARDIER WHO'S AIRCRAFT WAS SHOT DOWN DURING A DISASTROUS 'SPECIAL DUTIES' OPERATION IN WHICH 2 OUT OF 4 LANCASTER'S WERE LOST ON THE NIGHT OF 10/11 DECEMBER 1943. BAILING OUT AND TAKEN PRISONER, A DETAILED ACCOUNT WAS LEFT BY HIM IN 1978.



741450 Warrant Officer Norman Batey, of Burnopfield, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, was born on 16 December 1922 and enlisted for service with the R.A.F.V.R. on 11 August 1941. Qualifying as an Air Bombardier, Batey is first picked up being posted to 49 Squadron from 165 Conversion Unit on 3 July 1943. Operating with Lancaster III's from Fiskerton, Batey would take part in 11 operations with 49 Squadron, initially with F/O Cottingham's crew, who he had been with at 165 Conversion Unit. Batey's first Operation was a baptism of fire, being a raid on Essen, on the night of 25/6 July 1944. This was followed by a raid on Hamburg the following day and another raid on Hamburg on the night of 29/30 July. Raids on Milan, Leverkusen and Muchen Gladbach followed and on the night of 31 August/1 September, a raid on Berlin, during which one of the crew shot down an enemy fighter. On 5/6 September, Batey flew his last raid with the Cottingham crew, a raid on Mannheim and on 22/23 September, flew with the crew of P/O Tavender on a raid on Hanover. The following evening, he joined W/O Bull's crew on another raid on Mannheim. Four days later, W/O Bull's crew, including the newly joined Sergeant Batey, were posted to 617 Squadron on 27 September 1943

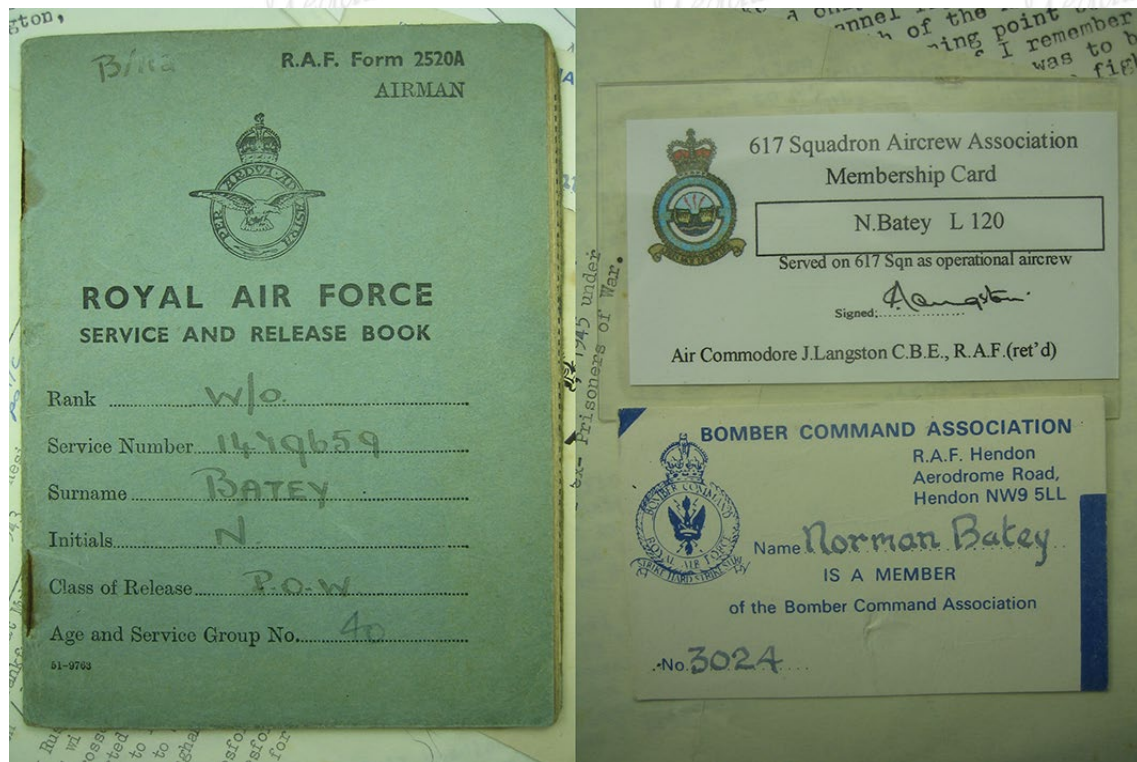
A fine website on 49 Squadron can be found here:

<https://www.49squadron.co.uk/home>

Batey and the rest of Bull's crew reported to 617 Squadron on 29 September

On 9 October 1943, Batey was injured during a low flying exercises. The following extracted from 'Beyond the Dams to the Tirpitz: The Later Operations of the 617 Squadron':

"..an accident occurred while a low flying exercise was being carried out by Warrant Officer Bull (ED886 'O'). They were flying at 25-30 feet. The bomb aimer, Norman Batey was in the nose map-reading when suddenly they hit the top of a tree. Bull caught sight of it just before they hit and pulled up slightly but all the Perspex was shattered, injuring Batey's face while his maps all blasted down the aircraft. The flight engineer assisted the injured man to the rest bed while the wireless operator put a dressing on the injured head. Despite his flying helmet, Batey had received a nasty wound which bled freely but he was the only one hurt.."



Promoted Flight Sergeant on 21 October 1943, on 11 November 1943, W/O Bull's crew, flying Lancaster III ED 886(0), carrying 1 x 12,000lb 'Tallboy' 'earthquake' bomb, took part on a sortie to Antheor Viaduct with 10 other Lancaster's from 617 Squadron. Reporting afterwards *"Bombed from 8,000ft. burst seen on railway, believed to be direct hit on or near tunnel. General conditions good, with no cloud but slight haze. Landed Blida airfield N. Africa."*

On 9 December, W/O Bull's crew (including Batey), along with three other Lancaster's and 16 ground crew, proceeded on special detachment to R.A.F. Tempsford, the home of 138 and 161 Special Duty Squadrons, who operated S.O.E. and other clandestine missions.

On the night of 10/11 December 1943, Bull's crew, flying Lancaster III ED 886(0), along with 3 other 617 Squadron Lancaster's, undertook a night-time 'special duties' operation to drop canister supplies to local resistance members at Doullens near Boulogne.

Approaching Doullens at 50 feet anti-aircraft fire opened up on the Lancaster's the fire being returned by all three turrets of Batey's aircraft but within a few seconds his Lancaster was hit, the port petrol tank catching fire and the crew given the order to bale out. Batey landed without injury thanks to his 'Irvin' parachute but had lost one boot whilst trying to kick open one of the escape hatches. Making a

rendezvous with several other members of their crew in heavy snow, they made their way towards a small town, but climbing into the belfry of a local church they were discovered by a German sentry, who called for further reinforcements, thus ending their attempt at escape. A detailed account of the above by Batey is included in the lot. See below:

Mr. A.W. Cooper,
47 Elmcroft Road,
Orpington,
Kent.

Dear Mr. Cooper,

Thank you for your letter of the 26th July regarding 617 Squadron and I note that you would like to have some information regarding our mission on the 10th December 1943. I shall be pleased to give you what information I can to assist you in your publication.

As you know four crews of 617 Squadron were detailed to proceed from Coningsby to Tempsford on the 9th December, the object being to assist 138 and 161 Squadrons in their work with the Special Operations Executive, dropping secret agents into France and also supplies of arms and ammunition.

On the 10th December after a little practice in dropping, from a low-level, canisters with parachutes attached, we were briefed for the operation that night. You already have the aircraft number and the names of the crew and the take-off time. We did not have an SOE agent in our aircraft and carried only the canisters of weapons and ammunition. We crossed the channel flying at low-level and crossed the French coast a few miles north of the River Somme heading towards Doullens which was to be our turning point before making the final run to the dropping point, which if I remember correctly was several miles north east of Doullens and was to be marked by a system of lights used by the French Resistance fighters. As we approached Doullens, where we had been led to expect no activity, we were flying at about 50ft. and then just as we were flying over the town, having identified it as the turning point, the anti-aircraft guns opened up and we seemed to be surrounded by blazing shells. Our gunners opened fire on the anti-aircraft batteries, F/S McWilliams from the front turret, Stewart from the mid-upper turret and F/S Thorpe from the rear turret, but within a few seconds we were hit and the port petrol tank was well and truly on fire.

Warrant Officer Bull handled the aircraft wonderfully well and tried to gain height. Indeed we did climb to about 7 or 800ft. when he called out 'O.K. blokes this is it, we've had it. Abracadabra Abracadabra' as the plane was by then almost unmanageable and was heading in one direction and that was towards the ground.

I grabbed my parachute, slapped it quickly into position and tried to give the standard reply 'Bomb aimer jumping', but the intercom appeared to have gone dead. I then ripped off the covers of the escape hatch and lifted it to throw it out and saw F/S McWilliams coming out of the front turret. The escape hatch jammed when I tried to throw it out as the slip-stream had caught

I kicked at it with my right foot and my foot became jammed between the escape hatch and the frame. Another quick thrust with my foot and the escape hatch was released but took my flying boot with it. I rolled forward through the escape hatch and when my parachute opened I saw that I was very close to the ground and it seemed only a few seconds before the earth was rushing towards me like an express train. I landed in a ploughed field, which was pretty solid due to frost, and the smack I received on the bottom of my spine caused me some discomfort for several weeks but no damage was done.

I had spotted two parachutes coming down in the next field and I saw one other some distance away. I rolled up my parachute and having seen a water trough in the field, decided that I would hide my parachute there. I had to break the ice on the water to push the parachute under and then I crossed over into the next field where I had seen two figures vanishing into the shadows of a haystack. I called out to them and when they stepped forward I saw that it was Sgt. Chamberlain the navigator and Sgt. Wiltshire the flight engineer. Away in the distance we could see a glow where the aircraft had crashed and we could hear the ammunition exploding.

We decided to make for Paris and spent the next few hours crossing fields and keeping away from roads as much as possible. We did see what we thought to be a German staff car travelling at great speed in the direction of where our aircraft had crashed but made no further encounters until we reached a small village where we thought we might rest in the church. We climbed into the tower only to find a German sentry there. Fortunately he appeared to be asleep but also in the process of waking up and we decided to get away as quickly as possible. We had not, however, gone very far when we heard a shout from behind and then someone was shooting at us with a rifle. No doubt this was the sentry who was by that time fully awake. We had dropped to the ground immediately he had started firing and we were getting to our feet ready to make a run for it when a German soldier wearing the black uniform with the death's head insignia came running up handling something like an automatic rifle or tommy gun. Then others came up and we decided very quickly that it was better to surrender. For the next two days we were moved around from one place to another, one being a very large house, then the prison at Amiens where they appeared to want nothing whatever to do with us and I think it was when they came to take us away from there that we found our pilot, W/O Bull, known to us as "Chuffy", in the truck. He had injured his legs when landing by parachute and I believe that as we were about 700ft. when I jumped he must have jumped from the plane at about 400 or 500ft. He told us that the Germans had informed him that our wireless operator, Sgt. Stewart, who had been in the mid-upper turret, had been killed, and later we were informed that our rear gunner F/S Don Thorpe had also been killed.

We spent that night in what appeared to be a military detention centre and the next day were taken from Amiens to Paris by train and then we were taken through Paris in a car with blinds drawn and threats to kill us if we tried to escape. As their guns were actually sticking into us there seemed very little chance of escaping at that stage.

Batey was taken into captivity as a prisoner of war, first via Paris, then to Dulag Luft near Frankfurt, and then on to Stalag IV-B where he remained until his liberation by the Russian army on 16 May 1945. He was then transported by the Russians to Reisa but 'departed from the Russians without permission and joined the American forces at Leipzig'. He was discharged from further service in October 1945.

During Batey's time in captivity a letter was received by his wife from Irvin Parachute Co, dated April 1945, stating that the Irvin Parachute Co. was very pleased to hear "that he had saved his life with an Irvin chute". They forwarded his membership card with the letter, however, it went on to state that "I regret that due to supply restrictions we are not able to order Caterpillar Pins for Prisoners until after the War, but one will be sent as soon as available." This was extremely common at this point in the war due to supplies and it is probable the majority aircrew entitled to post war issue Caterpillar Pin, never received one.

Lot includes:

- 1) 1939-1945 Star, Air Crew Europe Star, Defence and War Medal 1939-1945. Un-mounted, original ribbons.
- 2) Royal Air Force Service and Release Book "1479659 W/O N BATEY", with Class of Release noted as "PoW".
- 3) Caterpillar Club Membership Card "W/O N. BATEY", signed by Leslie Irvin, Honourable Secretary of the European Division of Irvin Parachute Co., address label affixed to the reverse, numbered "01169"
- 4) Caterpillar Club Letter, dated April 19, 1945, addressed to "Mrs. Batey, Newcastle-on-Tyne"
- 5) 617 Squadron Aircrew Association Membership Card "N. Batey L 120", laminated and his Bomber Command Association Membership Card
- 6) Copy two page typed 1978 dated letter from Batey, describing in detail his last flight and capture
- 7) Air Bombardier wing

Also copy pages of Batey's sorties from 49 and 617 Squadrons Operations Record Books, Wiltshire memoir, Report on Lancaster loss, POW details etc.



THE 10/11 DECEMBER OPERATION

Batey was a crew member on Lancaster bomber ED886, piloted by W/O Bull, which was hit by flak. He bailed out on the night of 10/11 December 1943 and was captured. His PoW number was 267434 and he was interned in Stalag IV B.

Lancaster III ED886 crashed near Terramesnil, in the Somme Département, not far from Doullens. Two of the crew were killed (STEWART and THORPE R.C.A.F.) and are buried in this village. Pilot BULL and 3 others were captured. F/Sgt J.H. McWILLIAMS evaded capture. Following Chorley's normal crew order, he would be the mid-upper gunner. Bill CHORLEY also note that his Lancaster took part in "Chastise" when it was captained by F/Sgt W.C. TOWNSEND, D.F.M.

Of the four 617 Squadron aircraft that took part in this operation, two were shot down

From the 617 Squadron Operational Records Book 11.12.43

"W/O. Bull, F/O. Weeden and crews reported missing from operations whilst on special detachment. Eight aircraft on night bombing practice. Six further ground crew personnel proceeded on special attachment." (Bull and Weeden were shot down carrying out an ammunition arms drop to resistance forces in Europe.)



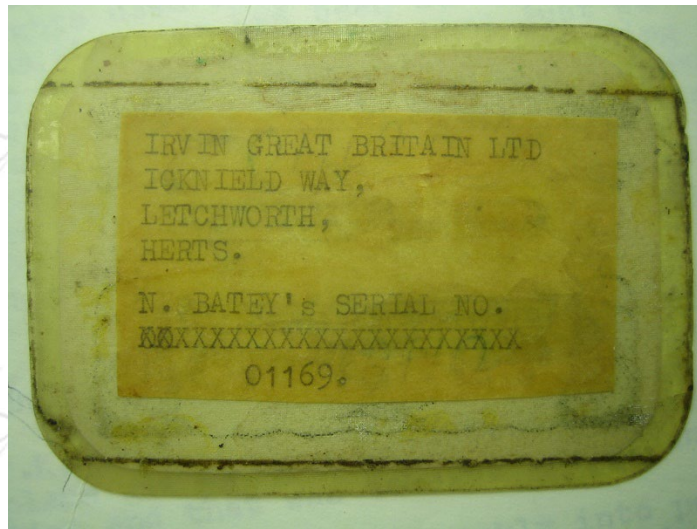
A MEMOIRE OF THE 10/11 DECEMBER OP BY A FELLOW CREW MEMBER

WO. Norman Batey is mentioned a number of times in Sergeant Cyril Charles Wiltshire's Memoires of 617 Squadron as he was one of the crew members who flew with Batey on ED866 and was shot down with him and was also taken prisoner.

".....In early December, a request was received from 161 Squadron for assistance with their duties, due to lack of aircraft and crews through losses. This squadron was located at Tempsford near Cambridge, and was engaged in all facets of underground assistance, such as dropping of agents and supplies, arms etc., to the European underground units. They operated solely on full moon nights because trips involved low level flying and visible map reading.

617 was requested to supply 4 aircraft and crews, and of course, everybody wanted to go to break the monotony of our daily training. We were lucky to be sent along with (pilots names) - FIt. Lt. McCarthy (American), FIt. Lt. O'Shaughnessy, W/O Weeden, and of course us. We flew down to Tempsford, on I think, the 8th December, 1943, arriving late afternoon. Our job was going to be to drop canisters at low level to a designated field in France, near I believe, Tournon. Because Halifax aircraft were

normally used to drop these canisters, we had to wait whilst our Lancasters were modified, and the trip was finally laid on for 9/12/43, but fog blanketed Tempsford that day and operations were cancelled. Being so near to London I requested permission to go home to see my wife whom I had married on October 27th at Stamford Hill in North London - a white wedding but necessarily quiet being wartime - also to see my parents. Permission was granted, so along with Chuffie, Mick, Don and Jack, we went to London. They had a night on the town whilst I went home. The morning of 10th December dawned with still the very heavy fog and I doubted whether the trip would be on. I said goodbye to Doreen and hinted I would probably be home in the evening unless the weather lifted.



After a slow trip by train to Tempsford, we attended briefing in the afternoon, but the trip was in doubt because of fog. The briefing was a bit misleading because the Army major who dealt with anti-aircraft positions had said that the trip would be a "milk run" because the route had been planned in such a way that we were totally clear of all anti-aircraft emplacements - how wrong he was. I think that because of the delay thru' weather, information had been leaked to the enemy because they were waiting for us. Tempsford of course, was a top security airfield, but because of the many "foreigners" engaged in this type of work, information could have been leaked. We were due to leave about 8 pm at 10 minute intervals in the following order:- McCarthy, O'Shaughnessy, Weeden and Bull. We were last because we were a non-officer crew. However, take off was all mucked up due to delays in fitting the canisters, and we finally took off at 1/2 hr. intervals. We were the only four aircraft operating that night, therefore, the radar defences only had our one batch of aircraft to follow. Being as the trip was to be at roof top height, we debated whether to take our parachutes, but decided to carry them. A good job we did.

We finally took off at about 2040 hrs. in Lancaster 111 No. ED 886 for a Special Duties operation over France to drop canister supplies in the Boulogne area near a place called Doullens. We headed over the Channel at wave height to keep below the radar and crossed the French coast at a point west of Boulogne. We then turned S.E. flying at 50 ft. on the radio altimeter to pick up our dropping field in the Doullens area. We came to a small village in I think the St. Pol area, and on approach we climbed to about 300-400 ft. so as to recognise the village and make sure if it was our turning point. It must be understood that navigation was by visible map reading, and, therefore, to find our dropping field meant extra surveillance especially at turning points.

As we approached the village and climbed a little, we saw a fire burning ahead and possibly should have given some thought that it might have been one of the three aircraft ahead as it certainly turned

out to be. Had we thought of that eventuality, we could possibly have foreseen the ferocious flak attack we were about to be subjected to. We climbed to about 350 ft when suddenly light flak batteries opened up on our starboard bow and I watched the incendiaries heading our way, but they seemed to be drifting below and I immediately rammmed the throttles to give maximum power to enable Chuffie to take evasive action.

R.A.F. Form 2520/11

ROYAL AIR FORCE CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE AND RELEASE

SERVICE PARTICULARS

Service Number } 1479659 Rank warrant officer
 Air Crew Category and/or R.A.F. trade hwp/s

Air Crew Badges awarded (if any)
 SOUTH AFRICA 16/3/43 " " " "
 Overseas Service 14/1/43 Pow 11/11/43 16/2/45

R.A.F. Character VG (see notes on back of certificate on opposite page)

Proficiency A Sgt (" ")
 " B Sgt (" ")

Decorations, Medals, Clasps, Mention in Despatches, Commendations, etc.

Educational and Vocational Training Courses and Results

DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth 16/12/22 Height _____

Marks and Scars _____

Specimen Signature of Airman N. Batey

Date 1/11/45

The above-named airman served in the RAFVR of N. BATEY (Block Letters) on full-time service, from 11/8/41 to 30/10/45 1.11.45.
 (Last day of service in unit before leaving for release and release leave).

Particulars of his Service are shown in the margin of this Certificate.

Brief statement of any special aptitudes or qualities or any special types of employment for which recommended :-

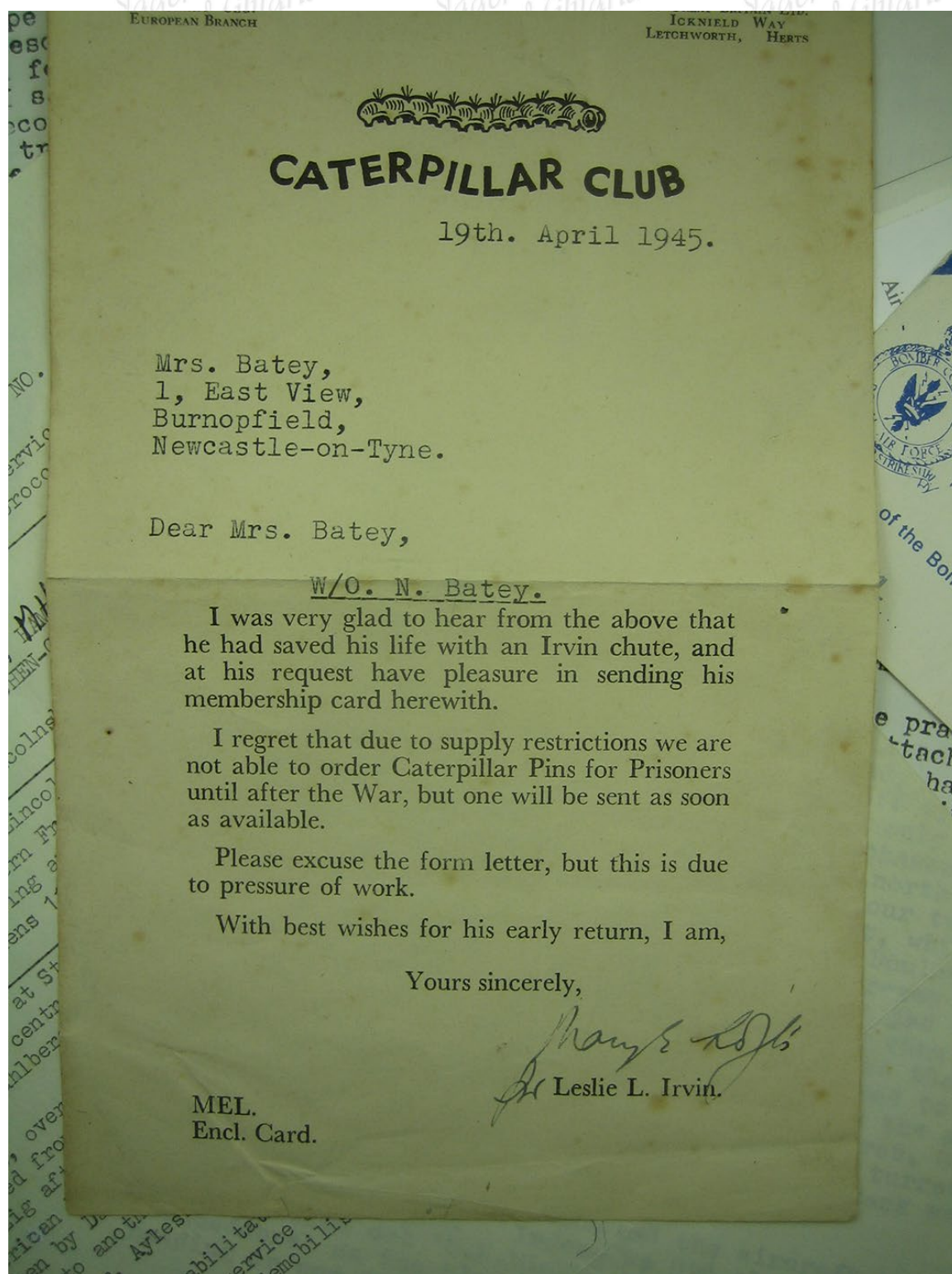
A. Tuniss. F. Lt.
Signature of Officer Commanding

Being full moon we could see the houses on the ground, and as Chuffie threw the plane around the skies I watched the shells coming and I watched the last incendiary shell go under and I yelled out, "We're through", but that last shell hit the inboard port petrol tank and the whole wing went up in flame. Chuffie immediately gave the "bale out" orders and flashed the signal lights to all crew positions in case their intercom was not working. Immediately the order was given Norman Batey (bomb aimer) opened the nose hatch and jumped followed by Mick Chamberlain (navigator) who pulled his 'chute in the cockpit which I bundled into his arms, and followed by the mid-upper gunner and then myself. Prior to going I had attempted to clip the pilot's parachute on, but every time he eased his weight on the controls, the aircraft tried to slip away down to port, so in the end the pilot told me to go as he could not hold it airborne much longer, so I went and it is miraculous to me that Chuffie was able to get his 'chute and jump to safety because by this time the aircraft was diving and very low. He landed in a church graveyard jarring his knees, dropped his parachute into a water barrel and crawled from the church-yard on hands and knees into a pair of jackboots, and for Chuffie the war was over, but we met up later.

Meanwhile, Mick, Norman and I landed in the same field and gathered together and decided which way to go....."

This full memoir is transcribed in full here:

http://www.49squadron.co.uk/assets/pdf/Cyril_Charles_Wiltshire.pdf



Warrant Officer NORMAN BATEY RAF SERVICE NO. 1479659

Operations over Germany, France & Italy, Service in South Africa, America and North Africa - Algeria and Morocco.

Bombing Operations over:-

ESSEN, HAMBURG, HAMBURG, DUISBURG, ~~HAMBURG~~ DUISBURG, MANNHEIM, LEVERKUSEN, BERLIN, BERLIN, MUNCHEN-GLADBACH,

49 Squadron, Fiskerton, Lincolnshire.

617 Squadron, Coningsby, Lincolnshire (*Detached 4 A/C to SOE Special Ops at Tansford*)
Antheor Viaduct, Southern France/ Italy border
Shot down when supplying arms to the French Resistance, 10th December, 1943.
Captured near Doullens 11th December, 1943. Five days before his 21st Birthday on 16th December

Prisoner Of War at Stalag 1VB at Muhlberg after having been in the interrogation centre at Frankfurt until transported in cattle trucks to Muhlberg 28th / 30th December, 1943. POW No. 267434

May 1943, over-run by Russians and transported to Reisa. Departed from Russians without permission and joined the American Forces at Leipzig after having crossed the River Mulde Having passed through Colditz. American Forces transported escaping P.O.W's to Halle. From there taken by Dakota aircraft to Brussels (Waterloo) then transported by road to another aerodrome to be taken by Lancaster bomber to Bicester, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.

Medical re-habilitation at Cosford, near Wolverhampton.
Released from service at Hednesford, October, 1945 under regulations for demobilisation for ex- Prisoners of War.

