

The Trip Over

Cherry and I had just come back to the barracks from the Service Club and were told to get our bags to the hangar where they were to be inspected and weighed. We were told that anything that was unnecessary was to be discarded but of course everything was important, especially the candy, cigarettes and all the other goodies that we were told we could not get in England. Most of our clothing was shipped in our duffel bags by boat with the ground crews. My flight bag along with a small duffel bag was bulging with all the extras I was taking. Ten cartons of cigarettes and several boxes of candy bars. Seven cheap wrist watches that if they quit I could throw away, along with plenty of toiletries that would be hard to get. My possessions were few compared to Snover who collected everything the Air Corps had or Lt. Grimes' 120 Tommy Dorsey records and a record player, or Levey's case of Bourbon. Capt. Melton showed up with our orders and we found we would have two extra passengers, one, a Lt. Jesse Milburn, the communications officer and two, a Joe Bowls, a Sgt. From the 369th who was AWOL and missing his squadron who had already left. These extra guys didn't set well with us because of the extra weight. There was so much confusion with the weighing that Cherry and I were able to get the records, player and Bourbon on the plane without being weighed to both Levy and Crimes appreciation. The ammo limit was a hundred rounds per gun which left plenty of space in my turrets ammo can for all my cigarettes and candy.

We finally got the OK to load the plane and by the time we finished I began to have reservations whether we would get off the ground. There was only enough room to get through the waist with bags piled to the window height. When everything was done I wanted to get to phone and call home to say my last "Goodbyes" but was told that all phone booths were locked. No outside calls could be made because of security. It was midnight, but since most of us couldn't sleep, we wrote our farewell letters home, and then turned in.

Briefing was at seven so after chow we headed for the hangar. The sky was overcast and had low hanging clouds which were not uncommon for Massachusetts, but as we reached the operations room in the hangar there was some speculation as to when we would take off. All crews were present when Col. Overacker came in. He gave a short talk of encouragement and told us take off time would be 08:25. This was it. We were taking off in spite of the overcast so the minute the briefing was over we went to the plane. Since the planes were parked wing tip to wing tip, we could see all the crews as they assembled at their planes and I walked over to talk a little with Bill Allen whose plane was next to ours. Now that the time had come to leave we were not as excited as we had been. Back at our plane we all tried to make small talk and on the sly we found out that our extra member, Milburn, got air sick when he flew. He would be riding in the waist with the luggage and Pappy Grimes said, "I hope he brought a bag. I don't want the SOB throwing up on any of my stuff. "Milburn was known to be a goof off who in civilian life was a radio announcer but knew little about radio itself. Melton and Cherry climbed aboard to go through pre-flight while the rest of us sat on the grass in front of the ship. Between the revving of the engines we joked and kidded each other. We had a good crew and felt closeness to each other and although Melton was more serious or reserved, it was because of the responsibility he had as pilot. From the cockpit window Melton motioned us to board and we began to taxi to position for take off. We were the second off and as soon as all were airborne and in

formation, headed north. Leaving the coast, the sun broke out to a beautiful day. Once we settled back, Melton gave the orders to Kramerinko, who in turn passed them back to Cherry and I to read. Our destination was Prestwick, Scotland via Gander Lake, Newfoundland. Of course Pappy, being the navigator, knew our destination and told us we would land approximately 1430 hours Greenwich Time. We never flew over 2,000 and as we flew over some of the various islands, we could see deer and moose feeding at the edge of the water. Circling over Gander we could see the dense forest and sparsely inhabited area.

On the ground we realised just how small this base was. There were a few trucks and jeeps and the personnel here was mostly English, Canadian and a small group of GI's. The area around was pine forests and sand. The barracks were well built and had steam heat. The base was originally built by the Germans in 1936 when they were trying to establish trans continental world air routes and when war broke out the English took over. We were free until six o'clock so we took off for their PX and brought a couple more cartons of cigarettes. We were travelling on per diem, which meant we were going to pay for our meals and lodging and would be reimbursed on payday. It cost three dollars for the evening chow, the bed for the night and breakfast. At six we met in the operations building where Col. Overacker spoke to us about the possible sabotash that was taking place here at Gander. We were told of Lt. John Leahy's plane from the 423rd Squadron which they thought exploded somewhere on the way over. The 423rd left a week before us. This news put the fear of God in all of us and made for serious thinking. We were also told that no one under any circumstances was to go into the woods that surrounded the base. It seems a couple wandered a few weeks before and they still hadn't found them. Because of the possible sabotash we were responsible for guarding our own plane. Our crew cut cards for the duty and Garland and I were the unfortunates. After losing the cut the second time I ended up with the one to morning shift. We left Garland with the plane and the rest of us went to the base theatre. The movie was *Orchestra Wives* with Glenn Miller's band. This was the fourth time I had seen it. After the movie I walked down to the ship. It got pretty cold these September nights this far north and Garland sat inside the plane up in the cockpit where he had a pretty clear view. I would do the same.

I yelled as I approached the plane and when I climbed aboard he said, "This is stupid. What are we supposed to do if we see somebody? Shoot at them with a 50? We don't even have a gun." This did seem dumb. Maybe we were supposed to make ugly faces at them. We talked about Leahy's plane going down and whether we knew any of the crew. None of us even got to know many of the other squadron's guys. It was something just to know the fellas in your own. Besides, we weren't together that long. It was only midnight but there was no reason Garland should hang around so I told him he might as well get some sleep, and then I griped about paying for a bunk that I wouldn't be using. The hours passed slowly and occasionally I dosed off with bits of fitful sleep.

Cherry showed up about six. He was a very dedicated engineer and this was his plane and he was checking things out. He informed me that we would be taking off "about nine tonight." We saw the perimeter guard, a Canadian parade pass, and nodded. We figured if he was guarding the planes we would go eat breakfast. Typical of the army we found out there were guards posted through the night. Since we had nothing doing until the afternoon I sacked out.

Joe Boles (our AWOL passenger) and I walked down to the plane where the gas truck was filling the planes. When they reached ours we helped Cherry in topping off the tanks. We had installed the bomb bay tanks back at Westover but did not fill them because of the weight and they were to be filled here. While we were doing this Snover checked out his radio equipment and later captain Melton showed up and we again went over the ship with a check off list. As far as we were concerned we were ready to fly. Levy showed up with some guy in a jeep and in the back was piled with parkas. He had brought one for each of us. They were beautiful. I didn't know what type of hide they were made out of but the leather was soft with fur inside and a big fur hood. He said he bought them from an Indian for thirty bucks a piece. We all tried them on and were the envy of the guys from the other ships. This was Lt Levy. Always the big pocketbook with a big heart to go with it. One of the Cannock's told us how the Indians made the parkas. He said they chewed the hides to soften them, and then soaked them in urine to bleach them. We wondered in what order they did it. They all fit good except Paddy Grimes'. Who was bigger than any of us? After supper the squadron met in the building for a briefing. They were nine crews and with the extra passengers made ninety - three men. Overacker came in and after the "At ease" began." Take off will be 2130 hours (9.30pm). There will be absolute radio silence en route and lights only in case of emergency. Take off will be at 60 second intervals and at daybreak every man will man his combat stations." I don't know how others felt, but I was nervous. I thought of Europe as a country with dark clouds and full of planes zooming around ready to shoot anything down. The Colonel did not mention the 423rd ship that exploded, but it was on everybody's mind. He ended with "Good flying and good luck" and dismissed us. The navigators were kept for a briefing and the rest of us went to our planes. Melton had us all check our Mae West to make sure they had CO2 cylinders and were not torn. I slipped into my overall so when Snover asked me if I had change of a five dollar bill, I had to slip my overalls down to get my billfold out of my hip pocket. After making change I put the billfold in my overall pocket, then slipped into my preserver.

The line was busy with crews at each plane lined up along the taxi strip. Grimes showed up with his brief case and flimsy and Cherry and I started to run up the engines as other planes began to do. They performed beautifully and after cutting them Cherry said, "I sure hope all the links are out of this baby. I wouldn't want anything to happen out there over the water." I agreed, as I never liked water. In fact, I was darned well afraid of it and the thought of it at night made it all the more frightening as I slipped on my A2 jacket. The sun was on its way down and the northern chill was setting in.

We climbed aboard and the engines were started all along the line. Due to the weight, we were to get as far forward as possible so Cherry and I stayed on the flight deck while those in the back packed in to the radio room. We would be in the fourth position and as the third pulled out I watched the panel clock. Melton called for quarter flaps. We pulled out to position and with the throttles open and then "Release brakes" and we were rolling. Leaving the runway wasn't that easy for the overloaded plane. It seemed to buck and creak and we used up every bit of the concrete as the engines strained to a lift-off. It was a steady grind upward as we took a last look at the Gander. Even though the horizon was visible, darkness was taking over rapidly and once we reached 2,500 feet, Melton throttled back and began to settle in his seat. Cherry went to the waist and I began to pack a couple of float cushions around the turret base to make myself comfortable. It would be a long night and there was nothing to see outside so I settled down and lit up a cigarette. The steady drone of the

engines always made me sleepy and after my smoke I dosed off. I awoke around 23.30 with Kramerinko talking to Melton. Their voices loud above the engines' roar. Since we were on radio silence, they had to holler to each other. The de-icers failed and they were trying to pick up altitude, hoping to find a warm air current as ice was building on the wings. It didn't take much to set me on edge and I began to compare the tone of their voices as to how serious the situation might be. If they were concerned, then I was. And over this big ocean as much as I hated water I was very concerned. Cherry had come forward to the flight deck and Melton told him our problem. Every now and then they would turn on the wing and landing lights but all I could see was a misty fog-like mess out there it also popped in my mind that there were other planes out there and so the possibility of collision. I liked having Cherry there with me behind Rush and Milton. If anything happened I was going to die and I wanted company. We climbed to 10,500 feet and because our problem was electrical our heaters were also out and at that altitude it got cold. Even though I was "sweatin this out" I was getting cold so I went back to get the waist and got my heavy flying jacket. The guys in the back of the plane had no idea of the problem and I wasn't about to tell them. Why shake them up. About the time I reached the flight deck we lurched and Rush let out a joyful yell. We had come on to a warm air current and it was enough to break the ice loose and with the extra weight gone there was a better feeling in the cockpit. We dropped back down to the lower altitude and off and on rain squalls. These were no problem though and we travelled on with the monotonous trip. This was again short-lived when it was discovered that the number two engine was overheating and a sign of sparks from the nacelle. Melton discussed the situation with Rush and also Cherry who I knew would assume the blame for the engine's problems and it was decided to feather No. 2. We could fly with three but we would consume more gas. As the captain feathered it he turned on the landing lights as we watched the prop slow to a halt.

This was around 23:30 and by 01:30 number three began flaming. The temperature gauge showed it running hot but not as high as No.2 had been. But this was not just throwing sparks. It was flaming. The captain had to feather this one also, but the flames still licked out of the nacelles and he had no choice but to use the extinguishers. This engine would not be running again and now that we were on only two, fear really hit me. We in flight deck were convinced that it had to be sabotash and when Levy and Grimes in the nose saw the second engine stop they stuck their head up through the hatch wanting to know what was going on. Although he was as sacred as I was Cherry had to be relieved that he could not be held responsible for engine problems in this situation. Melton told him to inform the rest of the crew in the rear of the situation. There nothing they could do but they had a right to know.

We tried to start up No. 2 and after running for about fifteen minutes it caught fire and it also was extinguished so we were definitely left with two engines for the rest of the way if we were to make it. I was under the impression that there was to be absolute radio silence but it must not have meant intercom as Melton came on and explained that we were on two engines and although we were flying at our established altitude speed he thought we should give thought to discarding some of our load. We should consider what would be expendable. Immediately Grimes and Levey began arguing about what they would get rid of. I didn't think that Melton was actually aware of what those two had on board. The record player and the hundred and twenty-five records of Poppy's or the case of Bourbon that Levey had would have been

sanctioned. Someone suggested we drink the whiskey and it's funny how scared one can be and yet there are comical things that happen. Little did Levey know what had or was happening to his booze. After the rest of the crew was informed of our problem, Cherry came up to the deck and told me to go back and "Check out that Looney". This was the Communications Officer Milburn and I went back and had a cigarette with Garland and Shoemaker. He (Milburn) had got into the case and stared in on a bottle which was now almost empty. Not only that but he gave the rest of the crew back there a bottle. Joe Bowles our other passenger handed me the bottle. I was never much for straight whiskey, but under these circumstances I took a healthy slug. As I passed Milburn, he appeared to be reading a newspaper or he was staring at it. The only thing was the paper was upside down. Who was he kidding?

The rest of the flight was harrowing. I never sat down, not that there was anything to do except to transfer fuel. I thought we were lucky under the circumstances, to have the two inboard engines out rather than both on one side. At least it made easier to fly. In order to transfer the fuel we had to cross feed from No.2 tank to No.4 tank or from No.3 to No.1. Of course we used all the fuel from the bomb bay tank first.

Flying in the dark over this big ocean on two engines was nerve wracking as hell and I began to have the greatest respect for Charles Lindberg. I decided he had a lot more guts than I. Evidently we were doing OK because there was no conversation between the two in the seats. Also nothing more was said about throwing anything overboard. When daybreak began I felt more relieved. At least I could see what was out there, even if it was just water. The oil pressure was good although the two remaining engines were running hotter than normal. I didn't catch how far out we were but Melton thought we could make it, at least this time. Light from the horizon would cause lower clouds to cast shadows on the water and I swore it was land only to discover it was a shadow as we passed over. Once we spotted a ship going the opposite direction. It looked like a Liner and they were flashing light signals. I asked Snover what they were saying when I went back to the radio room and he said, "They were asking if we were friendly." I thought this was dumb. "If that was a German ship, what would you have said? No this is your enemy?"

It was time that we all were to man our battle stations and I got into my turret. I had a much better view from this position looking out of the turret dome. We spotted land about 0740 but this was the Irish Free State and was neutral. Since we could not land here as we would be interned, Melton swung away from the coast heading out to sea and north toward Northern Ireland where we had bases. The Captain asked me to start transferring fuel from the tanks of the feathered engines to the two that were still running. As soon as I finished I climbed back in the turret. Within the next quarter hour the manifold pressure dropped and I noticed we were much lower than we had been. The engines were so overworked they were just wearing out. I ducked out of the turret to read the altimeter which showed about 300 feet when Melton looked at me and the heavy clothing I had on and said "you plan on walking or swimming?" He didn't have to say anymore. I began to peel out of my heavy jacket, my lighter A-2 jacket, and then thinking if we were going to ditch I didn't want any more clothes to weigh me down than I had to. I unsnapped my Mae West and got out of my coveralls. I was down to my ODs and slipped back into my preserver. As I climbed into the turret I saw the number one prop coming to a stop. At the same time Melton gave the

order to “prepare to ditch” and Pappy Grimes and Levey were coming up the hatch from the nose and were crawling between my legs heading for the radio room where, according to procedure, all of us were to be. I followed behind them but when I got there it was so congested that I felt we would be trapped and as scared as I was, I went on through to the waist. There were seven guys in that small space of the radio room and I would have made eight. Every one of them were positioning and bracing themselves but I thought I would go out the waist window. The .50 Cal was in the road and there was an open end wrench on a chain hanging on the gun post and I started to loosen the nut anchoring the gun. As I looked out the window it was like out of a rowboat. With my earphones unplugged I heard no commands and at that moment we hit. With the impact I flew forward from the window to the ball turret along with most of the flight bags piled along the sides of the plane. This was about eight feet away and I hit the turret mounts that support the turret. I hit my right side and felt the wind go out of me. Somewhat dazed, I still had that big fear of being trapped in a plane as I heard stories of how fast they would sink. The plane made a scraping and pounding sound as it skipped on the water until it stopped with a sudden lurch. At the time I hit the turret post I also hit Lt. Milburn, who had come out of the radio room because there wasn't any room on the floor and saw me back at the window. I may have hit harder but he helped to break my hit. He landed against the luggage with no injury.

I was trying to struggle to my feet, pushing barracks bags off me. The side of the ship was split open as though it was done with a can opener and as the ship settled, water was coming in as it bobbed below the water line. I never thought anymore about going out the window but scrambled for the waist door. Near panic, I didn't think of jettisoning it. I just opened it and jumped, pulling the cords, inflating my Mae West. I drifted back and as the plane bobbed in the water I was almost pushed under with horizontal stabilizer. I thought of getting as far as possible from the plane as I thought there would be suction when it went down. This wasn't true of course as it would fill much like a tin can and just submerge. I had no idea how I got so far away from the plane but I was close to a hundred yards. The water was rough and I would go up on a wave and then down and at the bottom a wave would fold over and pound me down. I would come up spitting and wiping my eyes. I could see that the right wing was broken loose from the fuselage but the life rafts were both inflated and guys were getting in them. As I rode the waves I saw Kramerinko straddling the vertical stabilizer at the bottom taking off his boots and throwing them at the guys in the dinghies. How could he be joking around at a time like this? The plane was not sinking as fast as the stories I had heard and then as scared as I was I never gave a thought about the bomb bay tanks. These tanks were empty and as big as they were; they acted like buoys and held the plane up for close to five minutes. In the meantime the crew was getting out very calm and orderly into the inflated dinghies. The only one who got wet at all was Melton who had a wet ankle. Had I followed procedure I would probably be dry also, instead of bobbing up and down like a cork in the rough sea. The Mae West, though it kept me up, seemed to keep me at a forty five degree angle, leaving the water line parallel with my mouth. As I bobbed and opened my mouth I swallowed sea water. Each time I came up with a swell I would look around to see how far I had drifted or if I could see any land, which I could not. I did see the plane submerge and thought of all that was going down with her. All those cigarettes, candy, and most of all that beautiful parka. I was still to the point of panic and tried to

keep my arms and legs moving and imagined that any minute a deep sea creature was going to grab me and pull me under. I tried to get back to where the dinghies were but it seemed useless and I began to holler for them to come out to me. Apparently it was too rough and with the small aluminium oars they couldn't get anywhere either. I continued to holler, telling them "I can't swim" and finally I heard one of them holler back, "Aw shut up." So I did. After a few minutes one of them would holler out, "Kess, are you OK?" and I would answer back.

I finally resigned to the fact that sooner or later if the sea calmed down I would somehow make it to the dinghies but in the meantime I went over the instructions we were given on the life preserver I had on. The air the CO2 cylinders had inflated it with would last approximately twenty-four hours and to refill them I would have to blow into the rubber hose that stuck up close to my mouth. I checked it out and prayed that it would not be that long. My ribs hurt and it hurt when I breathed deep, reminding me of football days indicting some cracked ribs. I got to the point where I couldn't keep my legs moving any longer and just gave up any type of movement and let the sea do whatever it would do. It was hard to keep from swallowing the salty water but the sea seemed a little calmer and I could see the dinghies better and occasionally some debris floating. Ernie Garland was in the dinghy closest to me and kept checking on me. The haze burned off and the morning sun began to shine, which helped some, but it seemed like an eternity here in the water. I began to realize just how insignificant I was in this huge expanse of water. The sun was high and above us now and though it was still a long way off I started thinking of the darkness that would eventually come. My depression was interrupted by the appearance of a plane which seemed to come out of nowhere. I couldn't hear it because of the water in my ears but it kept making passes over us and from my aircraft recognition it was a twin engine English Wellington or more commonly called a "Wimpy." All of us were screaming and yelling as though as though they could hear us over the roar of there engines. It had its bomb doors open and was trying to drop a life raft I thought to me since their passes were close to me. In fact, once they were so low over me the spray from the prop wash blew over me. The raft was yellow and was inflated and reminded me of a bomb but because it was inflated the air pressure forced it back up into the bomb bay. After several tries they gave up and left. At least we were found and this was a relief and within a short time I saw smoke appear on the horizon. As it got closer I could see it was a navy or military ship, not as big as a destroyer but it had a gun mounted on the front. I assumed the plane had radioed our location to it and they were here to rescue us. As the boat slowed and stopped I could just read its name, "Sir Gareth T - 227." I had no idea who Sir Gareth was but I would have kissed him at this time.

The crew lowered a life boat and rowed out to the dinghies and picked them up and then started back toward the ship. I began hollering like mad and I could see our guys pointing toward me. Evidently they never saw me, only the dinghies. Soon they were coming to me and they pulled along side me and pulled me in, I swore I would never get into water any longer than a bath tub. As I helped by grabbing the rim of the boat I noticed that there was grey paint all over me. On my face, shirt, pants and then I noticed it on the other guys too. We learned that they had just painted the life boat,

not anticipating having to rescue anyone. At this point I didn't care what I looked like. I was just glad to be alive.

Once aboard, we found the ship was an Irish mine sweeper and the crew, with the exception of three or four, spoke Gaelic. We conversed in sign language. They took me below to the boiler room where I stripped since I was the only one soaked, and hung my clothes to dry. The heat felt good and I wrapped myself in a blanket they gave me. The ship's captain spoke English and ordered rum and tea for us. I had gotten drunk on rum before and couldn't stand the smell of it. When the sailor handed me a cup I took one whiff, handed it back and headed for the rail. It was mostly salt water that came up. This was to the delight of the sailor who was not about to let the drink go to waste and downed it in one gulp. He looked after me, even though we could only talk in sign language. As I was changing back into my clothes he kept looking at my two dollar wrist watch. I was so glad to be alive I took it off and gave it to him. He was like a kid with a new toy and I chuckled to myself because as long as it was in that salt water, I was sure I would never run again.

It was bad enough losing our plane and all our possessions and when I took inventory I had a pocket comb and a dime that I found in my pocket. I remember putting my billfold in my coveralls at Gander which I hastily stripped out of before we crashed. I had \$75.00 in it as well as pictures that I cherished. We met another ship that had a RAF officer who came aboard and interrogated us. Soon an American Navy PT boat pulled up and we transferred aboard. The crew passed out cigarettes and gave us a real ride to Londonderry, an American Navy and Marine base. At the base we noticed an absence of personnel on the streets, although faces were at the windows looking at us and we noticed a lot of black eyes and some bandaged heads. We were met by a Marine captain who looked like a leftover from WWI. He wore a campaign hat and had the face of a bulldog but he turned out to be quite receptive to us. We looked a mess smeared with grey paint and my OD's were streaked with white from the salt water. The captain took us to one of the shops where some sailors were working on engines and with rags and solvent we cleaned the paint off of us. From there we went to their mess hall where we were introduced to a naval lieu tenant a young good looking guy who looked fresh out of Annapolis. My ribs were killing me and I felt a little nauseous and I couldn't raise my arm without sharp pain. Since we hadn't had anything to eat since the night before the naval officers had the cooks prepare something for us. The marine came back with a carton of cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey. We each took a pack and Melton poured each of us a drink. I figured the booze would help kill the pain. While we were sitting around the tables the old captain told us why there was no one on the streets. "The boys went into the town last night, got to celebratin' some, got into a brawl with the town folks, and ended up getting' into it with other. So we had to confine them to barracks." Then he looked up to the naval lieutenant and said, "Kind of wupped your boys, didn't we John?" Also in the conversation, when the captain asked where we had gone down, Pappy Grimes said, "Off Magilligan Point." This was the northern tip of Ireland. I also found out here that their Snover was the last to leave the plane and had to be pulled out of his seat as he continued to send out "maydays." I couldn't help having a lot of admiration for him. I couldn't wait to get out while he was the last to leave. We each had another drink and the cooks brought out a big plate of fried ham, potatoes and beans. I ate a

little but then began to get sick. Kamerinko looked at me and said, “Christ Kess, you’re white as a ghost. What’s the matter?”

I think I got some busted ribs, sir.” The Navy officer took over and had me go with him to the infirmary. One of the corpsmen helped me to undress but I couldn’t get my undershirt off. It was stuck to my skin where the seepage from the abrasions had dried. The corpsman had me lay on a gurney so I lay face down as my arm could hang down and it didn’t hurt this way. I didn’t know where he went or how long he was gone but I fell sound asleep. I totally exhausted and once I lay down I was gone.

I awoke with a jolt as something cold hit my skin. I looked up to see the cutest little Irish nurse I had ever seen. She had a bottle that smelled like ether and was soaking my underskirt where it was stuck. Kramerinko was there also as well as the corpsman, and the nurse was telling me to turn on my side. I had nothing on from the waist down and was not about to roll over. Everybody was enjoying this but me. Kram was needling me, saying, “Aw come on, Kess, roll over. You ain’t got nothin’ she hasn’t seen.” I know my face wasn’t the only place red. The nurse, understanding my embarrassment, threw a towel over my rear end and I turned over. She wrapped my ribs with gauze because of the abrasions and then taped me. I felt a little better but still didn’t want any food. Kramerinko stayed back with the nurse and thought we were staying over, but somebody had different plans and after dark we were driven in a six-by-six to a small airfield and flown on a C47 to Prestwick, where we met up with the rest of the outfit.

They didn’t know we had been rescued and were surprised to see us. The group was billeted in transit barracks which had just cots and we had to draw blankets. Everyone gathered around to hear our stories and even though we took a ribbing about trying to get some glory, they were glad that we had made it. We were all dog-tired since we had been awake for more than thirty hours and I know I was asleep before my head hit the pillow. Sometime during the night I felt something crawling on me and I awoke to see a huge rat sitting on my legs. There were a couple of lights on and I could make it out. At first I thought it was a cat, it seemed so big, but when I moved it crawled off and jumped to the floor and took off. I drifted off asleep again and when I woke in the morning half the barracks was empty. When Bill Allan and Bohland came in, I asked where they went and they said they found another place. They too had seen the rats and since “the place was crawling with them,” they looked for another barracks. I thought maybe I had had a bad dream but with their verification it had to be real. Since we would be leaving for our base in England we would not worry about rats. Our crew would split up and fly with whoever we wanted to. Since I had no toilet articles, I had to borrow Allen’s and so also flew with him. The flight was little more than an hour from Prestwick to Thurleigh and as we circled we got an aerial view of our new home in England. I would see this same view many times later.