

## First Casualty – four extracts

### First Casualty – Extract 1 – Charles and Group Captain

*The C/O's office.*

- CHARLES                      Sergeant Newman reporting, sir. Wireless Operator. I believe you wanted to see me sir.
- GROUP CAPTAIN            That's right. *(He offers his hand)*. Pleased to have you with us. We've heard good things about you from your Operational Training Unit.
- CHARLES                      Thank you, sir.
- GROUP CAPTAIN            Which is really why I wanted to see you. You got here pretty sharpish didn't you?
- CHARLES                      Yes, I didn't have very far to come, sir.
- GROUP CAPTAIN            Yes, well. I would normally speak to a new crew all together, you see, but er, something's come up. The likelihood is, your crew won't be on operations for a little while yet, unless we get some new aircraft. Don't worry - you'll benefit from all the extra practice you'll all be able to put in. But, anyway, the fact is that we've got a crew who lost their wireless op on the last trip - to Rositz I think it was - and our only spare man has just gone on compassionate leave - his father, not very well, or something like that. I only let him go because I knew you were on your way.

*Charles is pleased by this.*

- GROUP CAPTAIN            And besides, taking another chap out of his own set-up - well, they never like that very much. It's just this once - their last trip, and you can go back to your own mob with one under your belt. What do you say?
- CHARLES                      Thank you, sir. That would be... marvellous. *(He means it)*. Is it Able's, crew by any chance?
- GROUP CAPTAIN            That's right. How did you know that?
- CHARLES                      I'm billeted with them - not that I've met them yet, sir. The corporal in the guardroom told me about them. He didn't say they'd lost their wireless operator, though.
- GROUP CAPTAIN            No, well. Anyway, that's why I've had you put in with the other sergeants in Old Annie's crew. Give you a chance to get to know them. There hasn't been an opportunity of putting on a show for the last

few days, what with the weather we've had – we're just waiting for a forecast of a break in cloud over Germany, and you could find yourself on battle orders.

CHARLES Thank you, sir. I take it as an honour.

GROUP CAPTAIN Yes, yes. Well, there'll be no need to report to me tomorrow when I speak to your chums. But, there is just one other thing.

CHARLES Yes, sir?

GROUP CAPTAIN Yes. Tell me - what is your attitude towards the enemy?

CHARLES The Germans? I'm not sure I know exactly what you mean, sir.

GROUP CAPTAIN Well, I want to be sure. I mean, do you hate them?

CHARLES *(Unsure of how serious the Group Captain is being)* Hate them? I don't know. Yes, I suppose I do.

GROUP CAPTAIN There must be no suppose about it - either you do or you don't.

CHARLES I want to do all I can to help the war effort, sir. I don't think I'd really thought about actually hating the Germans.

GROUP CAPTAIN *(Unconvincingly)* Hun-hate. You need it. If you haven't got it, then other things get in the way. You've heard of L.M.F. haven't you?

CHARLES Lack of Moral Fibre? Yes, sir.

GROUP CAPTAIN Well, I can tell you. Almost every case I've come across was more than just cowardice in the face of the enemy - they just didn't have that vital ingredient - Hun-hate. Remember that, lad, and you won't go far wrong.

CHARLES Thank you, sir. I'm sure that will be very helpful.

GROUP CAPTAIN Now, I suggest you get yourself over to the Sergeants' Mess and introduce yourself. You're probably just in time for lunch. You'll get to meet your skipper, Flying Officer Tully, in due course.

CHARLES Thank you sir. I'll do my best not to let you down.

GROUP CAPTAIN That's the spirit. Off you go.

**Second extract from First Casualty – Charles and O’Connell**

*In the Sergeants Mess*

- O'CONNELL            Have you seen the Old Boy yet?
- CHARLES              The Group Captain? Yes, I have.
- O'CONNELL            Did he shoot you that Hun-hate line?
- CHARLES              Yes, he did. I wasn't expecting anything quite like that.
- O'CONNELL            He doesn't mean any of it, you know. He uses it on all the new bods because he thinks it might stiffen the resolve and all that. If he could convince us, he might just about convince himself.
- CHARLES              I didn't think his heart was in it.
- O'CONNELL            It wasn't. You wouldn't know this - but he was a linguist at Cambridge. He was in Germany before the war. Tully told me that 'cos he doesn't think the Old Man's up to his job, thinks he's a bit too soft.
- CHARLES              You don't like Tully, do you?
- O'CONNELL            He's all right, really. His trouble is that he wants to be a Squadron Leader at the very least before the war's out - and he hasn't got very long left, has he? It doesn't do him a lot of good in the Officer's Mess when I keep writing to High Wycombe.
- CHARLES              ...My God! What about?
- O'CONNELL            All sorts. Area bombing mainly. Bombing civilians in their cities isn't going to speed things up. The only policy I can see in bombing as we do is to leave Germany in smouldering ruins.
- CHARLES              You wrote that to H.Q.?
- O'CONNELL            Not in so many words. In my last letter I said that discipline on the stations would be greater if they took more trouble in briefing to explain the "moral and strategic justification of a target" - but that was only my way of saying there's no justification for area bombing. They think it's better for our morale if we don't know the true nature of what we're doing - that thousands have died, let alone hundreds of thousands of civilians, for the sake of a questionable bombing strategy. Ours not to reason why.
- CHARLES              The love that asks no questions.
- O'CONNELL            My God, I haven't persuaded you, have I?

CHARLES No, but I was always taught at school to approach every question with an open mind and a shut mouth. I'll need to think about it before I tell you what I think.

O'CONNELL The others think I'm getting at them when I shoot my mouth off - but you won't find better people anywhere. We fight down fear all day before a raid; you go through all your own little superstitious rituals; you try and occupy yourself with routines, but that stomach-gnawing fear is always there. And nobody says a word. We go in, do our job and get out; the thing that makes me different, I think, is that I want to know why we do it.

CHARLES What happened to your last wireless operator?

O'CONNELL Botch... *(pause)* I can honestly say that he's the only real friend I've ever had.

CHARLES Why was he called Botch?

O'CONNELL Because he was the worst bloody wireless op in Bomber Command. He couldn't pick up a signal if he was sat on a flaming radio mast. I don't suppose you're any better?

CHARLES No, I don't suppose I am. *(O'Connell smiles at long last, pause)* What... what happened? The others never said.

O'CONNELL Flak, over Rositz. It was only part of the plane that got hit. He was looking out through the astrodome, the bombs had gone, and we were turning for home. It wasn't a big hole – hardly enough to put your fist through – but Botch was sliced nearly in two. He couldn't have known a thing about it. I was the only one who was free to clear things up. It... it wasn't very nice.

CHARLES I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked.

O'CONNELL No, you're right to ask. You ought to know. It's what happens. It used to be a damn sight worse, mind you. Surviving twenty trips was a miracle - surviving a tour was impossible. Thanks to the Americans, Jerry hasn't got the pilots or the oil to put up that much resistance anymore. What happened to Botch was a freak. It's not often a wireless op gets it without the whole crew getting the chop - if that's any consolation. You won't believe it, but Botch was the first casualty I'd ever seen close up, the first dead man I've ever seen. *(Pause)* How old are you Charlie?

CHARLES Nineteen.

O'CONNELL                      That's how old I was. No wonder Harris calls us his Bomber Boys.

### **Third extract – the Briefing – C/O, WAAF, Airman and aircrew**

*Individual crews sit together on benches. At the far end of the hut there is a platform where the technical officers sit. A large map of Europe, fixed to the wall, is covered by a sheet. A WAAF corporal announces the arrival of the C/O.*

WAAF CORPORAL    Gentlemen, the station commander.  
*Everybody rises, the C/O walks to the platform.*

C/O                      You've already had your specialist briefings, so pilots and navigators will already know that the target for tonight (*he walks to the map and uncovers it*) is Dresden.

*A general murmur breaks out. We will hear things like 'where?' and 'Christ, it is a long one'. The murmuring gradually subsides.*

C/O                      It's a long haul alright, but all of you have been to Berlin and back, so you know what it's all about (*Charles receives a playful nudge from Archie*). It's only because of the length of the trip that we've been asked to select you, our most dependable crews.

*There is an ironic cheer at this point.*

C/O                      You shouldn't experience too many problems over the target. Dresden has never been bombed before, except when the Yanks hit it by mistake, and then they didn't do any damage. (*Another cheer*). We've left the place alone for so long that, with luck, what flak they put up isn't likely to be very accurate. They're not getting so many fighters up against us nowadays, as you know, so if you stay in the mainstream, you should be fine. You will be part of a second wave attack of over five hundred Lancasters from 5 Group – this is stoke-up job – a bit like Hamburg, if any of you remember that. Your aiming point is the fires the first wave should have got going for you. Now are there any questions so far?

AIRMAN                Permission to light up sir?

*A general laugh.*

C/O                      Of course

*(Cigarettes are produced, offered, lit up)*

O'CONNELL          Excuse me sir. What is the nature of the target at Dresden?

C/O Thank you, sergeant O'Connell, I was coming on to that. Dresden is the seventh largest city in Germany – and certainly the largest unbombed city. We know that there are refugees pouring westwards before Marshall Koniev's advance, and many of them will be in Dresden or heading for it. The effect of this raid should be to halt industry in the city, destroy as much of the housing stock as we can and to disrupt telephone and rail communications within the district.

AN AIRMAN Bombing refugees, sir?

C/O No, don't get me wrong. What should result is an exodus of refugees from Dresden, which should severely hamper military movement in the area. Communications are our target. Many of you will know that the Prime Minister and the American President have been meeting with Stalin at Yalta recently. I would hazard the guess that since this is the first raid since that conference broke up it's been requested at the highest of levels. Your bomb load will be mainly incendiaries and you are to aim for the centre of the city.

There is just one other thing. If you get into trouble over Dresden, your most obvious course of action will be to head for the Russian lines – about 30 miles due east, and a damn sight easier than crossing the whole of Germany. However, you must bear in mind that many of the Russians will not have seen RAF uniforms before and might mistake you for Germans (*a general laugh*) In which case, they'll just as likely shoot you as look at you (*silence*). For that reason, you'll be issued, along with the normal emergency pack, a scarf with an embroidered Union Jack – which you will hand in when you get back!

*(ironic laughter).*

Also, you will be issued documents identifying you as British aircrew. Right, if there are no further questions... (*O'Connell looks as though he's going to say something, but holds back*)... then I'll hand over to the Met Officer...

*The scene fades amidst the hubbub as the C/O takes a seat and the Met Officer comes forward.*

#### **Fourth extract from First Casualty –Williams, Tully, O'Connell and Charles**

*A Lancaster night-flying. Inside the aircraft.*

TULLY Bomb-aimer (*No reply*) Bomb-aimer!

O'CONNELL Skipper?

TULLY Were you asleep down there O'Connell? God, if you were asleep, I'd...

O'CONNELL I wasn't asleep.

*O'Connell comes aft to eject window. He sees something from the cockpit.*

O'CONNELL Are those lights? Can you see that glow?

TULLY It must be Dresden. We can't be there already.

WILLIAMS There's still about forty miles to go sir.

O'CONNELL They're not lights, then. The whole city must be burning.

TULLY Get back into place, bomb-aimer. This isn't a side-show.

*O'Connell passes through.*

TULLY You couldn't ask for a better visual fix despite the cloud cover. The first wave have done a good job.

CHARLES Gosh, you can even see the glow from the astrodome. It's amazing.

O'CONNELL Isn't it?!

*In the aircraft, fifteen minutes later.*

WILLIAMS Only about five miles from the target now, sir.

O'CONNELL Cloud cover's virtually gone, skipper. The met boys were spot on this time.

TULLY I can't believe what I'm seeing – it's like daylight. I can see Lancs all around us. They could pick us off like flies.

WILLIAMS No flak, yet, skipper.

TULLY For Christ's sake keep your eyes peeled for fighters, everyone. They'll have a field day if they put any up. Are you in position, bomb-aimer?

O'CONNELL Yes, skipper.

TULLY We'll keep a straight course for now. Listen out for the master-bomber. We should be over the middle of the city in a minute or so.

*The aircraft suddenly jolts violently*

WILLIAMS What the hell was that?

O'CONNELL Have we been hit?

TULLY Wireless Operator – are you ok? Wireless operator?

WILLIAMS *(who has gone to check)* He's been sick into his mask, sir. We'll have to take it off him skipper.

TULLY I'm not going below oxygen altitude over a target. Just do your best.

O'CONNELL You could take her down, sir. There's no flak – nothing.  
WILLIAMS He's in a bit of a bad way, sir. He must have swallowed most of it again.

O'CONNELL If you stay out of the fringes, skipper, there won't be any danger from our own bombs.

TULLY Trust this to happen. Ok, we're going down, and sharpish. Just don't blame me if anything happens. Diving now!

WILLIAMS He's been sick again, sir. The dive has probably done the trick.

TULLY Once we're down, we're not hanging around. What caused that jolt, flight engineer?

WILLIAMS It must have been convection currents cause by the fires down there.

O'CONNELL It's like a furnace. You can almost feel the heat.

TULLY Don't talk daft. How is he?

WILLIAMS I've cleared the throat, skipper, but his mask's completely fouled up. I'll give him bursts of my oxygen until I've cleaned it up.

TULLY Good man.

WILLIAMS God, I can see bombs dropping. I've never seen that before. We're really giving them hell. It's like a giant bonfire party.

O'CONNELL He's coming round, I think.

TULLY I'm levelling out when we're at ten thousand. I think you'd better select your own target, Bomb-aimer, now we're out of the stream. I'll take us back over the middle.

O'CONNELL There's no point. The city's ablaze – the job's been done.

TULLY What the hell are you talking about? We haven't come all this way for you to decide what's needed and what's not.

O'CONNELL I've got a target for us. When we've levelled out, I want you to hold her steady.

TULLY We're over the fringes, O'Connell. If you're dumping, you're on a charge.

WILLIAMS He'd better not be bloody dumping.

TULLY Ok, levelling out. I'm going to take us back round.

O'CONNELL No! For Christ's sake, hold her steady now! You stupid bastard.

TULLY I'm not taking that from you, we're...

O'CONNELL Bomb doors open.

TULLY What?!

O'CONNELL Bomb doors open. Master switch on.

TULLY Master switch on. I don't know what you're up to, but I'm going to have you for this!

O'CONNELL Bombs fused and selected.

TULLY Bombs fused and selected. You're fooling nobody, you know. You're not going to get away with this O'Connell.

O'CONNELL Bomb doors closed.

TULLY Let's get the hell out of it. Sergeant O'Connell, you are under open arrest. They'll throw the book at you for this.

*An hour later. In the aircraft.*

CHARLES Skipper!

TULLY What is it?

CHARLES I'm picking up some sort of broadcast, sir. It's in English, but it's not on any of our frequencies.

WILLIAMS It'll be a Jerry propaganda broadcast.

TULLY Tune in – let's see what he's got to say for himself. Mind you, he's got one convert already.

O'CONNELL Mind what you say, Tully. You'll answer for that.

CHARLES It's not coming through very well. Ah, that's better.... My God, they're talking about Dresden.

TULLY That'll be for us all right. They keep pushing these things out hoping that we might tune in. What are they accusing us of this time, eh?

CHARLES RAF – terror tactics – 60,000 civilians dead, at least – war crime – city still blazing... I'm losing it.

WILLIAMS Who's going to believe that? 60,000 dead. They're off their heads, it's impossible.

TULLY Don't worry – it's only what they want you to believe.

O'CONNELL Is that the only reason you don't want to believe it?

TULLY What do you mean by that?

O'CONNELL You saw what we did to that city. You saw the flames. A city of half a million people swollen with refugees.

TULLY There are such things as air-raid shelters.

O'CONNELL Yes, and maybe one in ten just didn't make it in time, or didn't have a shelter to go to. Just maybe there were those who thought we wouldn't drop bombs on Dresden – why else would refugees head there?

TULLY Don't you think you're in enough trouble without putting your faith in rot like that?

O'CONNELL So what if it's thirty thousand dead, or twenty? When does it start to become believable?

TULLY That's enough. My god! Sixty trips you've done O'Connell and you have to wait till now to show your true colours. In the face of the enemy, you obey orders. There's a term for what you've got you know that, don't you?

O'CONNELL Lack of moral fibre. There is just one thing...

TULLY What's that?

O'CONNELL Do you know what day it is today? (silence) Ash Wednesday, Ash, bloody Wednesday.