

William Francis JACKMAN was born in Balham in 1894, the elder brother of my grandfather who was born 5 years later. I don't think they had much to do with each other in the early years as by 1901 (when my grandfather was 3) he was at Crediton Grammar School (presumably the prep department), while my grandfather was still in Balham. Much later, when the question of their parents' marriage was raised by my mother doing family history research, Will was adamant he was not going to talk about it. Grandad did not know anything at was interested to find out what the scandal might be (I think it was that his parents were cousins... this is certainly the most obvious conclusion we can draw from the documents).

He then went to Sherbourne Grammar School, and was a successful sportsman, winning several cups. On leaving school in 1911, he worked as a cadet in the White Star Line from 5 Sept 1911, on then briefly on an armed Merchant cruiser when WW1 started, before transferring to the Royal Navy in Sept 1914 as a midshipman and rose to be an acting lieutenant at the battle of Jutland on 31 May to 1 June 1916. He was a Lieutenant when he was demobilised in Oct 1919, joining the RN Reserve and marrying Kate FENTON (some records say "Diana") in 1920. He joined the Merchant Navy (maybe when he was demobilised) and became 1st Mate 10th Feb 1921, and then Master 13th Nov 1922. During this time his address is given as 60, Park Road, Lowestoft, though curiously he appears on the electoral roll in Exmouth in Devon.

At some point they moved closer to his parents in law, and were living at a bungalow in Monk Fryston, near Selby by 1934. They were there in 1939 and presumably also during the course of WW2.

When WW2 started he joined the Air Sea Rescue, somewhat strangely at a distance in Norfolk. (Wikipedia quotes 193 stations and 339 auxiliary stations in 1931). On 1st July 1941 a Blenheim IV of 139 Squadron, was shot down on return from a bombing raid and ditched in the North Sea at 12.48pm. At 15.30, Air Sea Rescue were alerted and boat HSL 108 from the 24 Air Sea Rescue Unit (captained by WFJ) was launched from Gorleston in Norfolk. HSL 108 was captured in the North Sea by the Germans that evening after a flying boat attack from one or more Arado Ar 196 and one of the crew (wireless operator Guilfoyle) was shot and buried at sea. One of the survivors (Drayson) was taken by sea plane to Schellingwoude, a sea plane base near Amsterdam that night. The remaining 5 (WFJ, Cox'n Sgt Hales, Engineer Raybould, gunner Daggett, sailor Overill), were picked up at 6.30am on 2nd July by two Heinkel He 59 rescue aircraft and also taken to Schellingwoude (see the picture below).

I have not spent a long time investigating the other members of the crew, but I have established this:-

W. HALES, wounded, POW details unknown
LAC (Leading Aircraftman) GP DRAYSON, reg 1165605, POW 39242
LAC AB RAYBOULD (maybe 1919-2007) reg 946672, POW 39337
LAC Edward GR DAGGETT (1921-?) reg 1167012, POW 39225
LAC AG OVERILL (maybe 1910-1975) reg 964939, POW 39222
LAC William Thomas GUILFOYLE (1921-1941), ref 620420

When he was debriefed following his return to the UK on 11 May 1945, he reported that he was in the following camps:

- Amsterdam 2/7/41-7/7/41
- Dulag Luft 7/7/41-9/7/41
- Oflag IX A/H 9/7/41- Sept 41
- Oflag VI B Sept 41-Aug 42
- Oflag XXI B Aug 42- Mar 43
- Stalag Luft III Mar 43- 29/4/45.

At this stage, or perhaps before, he was given the rank Acting Flying Officer. The records from Gorleston describe him as Flying Officer. Certainly all the camps, except Amsterdam, were Luftwaffe camps presumably for captured airmen.



Dulag Luft (*Durchgangslager der Luftwaffe*) was a transit and interrogation camp for Allied aircrew POWs at Oberursel near to Frankfurt. The implication of a short stay here is that WFJ was not disruptive and more importantly did not give any indication that he would pass information to the Germans. (He stated in his debrief that he gave nothing away). Ken Fenton's war says this :- "After two or three days of interrogation by both the Luftwaffe and Gestapo the rest of the Blenheim and the HSL crew were taken by train to Dulag Luft at Frankfurt-am-Main, where they were separated from Captain F/O Jackman..... All the various crewmembers received additional interrogation from bogus Red Cross personnel and were asked to fill out additional forms."

Oflag – short for "Offizierslager" - were camps for Officers. Oflag IX (standing for military zone IX A/H (standing for head camp, to differentiate from A/Z, standing for sub camp) was near to Kassel.

Oflag VI B was near Warburg in central Germany. There was an escape in Dec 1941, though there is no suggestion that WFJ was involved.

The move to Oflag XXI B appears to be as a result of the temporary closure of Oflag VI B. Wikipedia says this was Sep 1942. Probably a more accurate date than given by WFJ above. This camp was in Pomorze, in occupied Poland. The camp was cleared in Apr 1943 (according to Wikipedia) and all POWs were sent to Stalag Luft III, which had been enlarged.

Stalag Luft III (literally Main Camp, Air, III) was the camp in Poland from which the "Great Escape" happened, though as far as I can tell WFJ had not part in any way on this. The winter of 1944/5 was particularly bad, partly the weather itself, and partly the fact that the war was going badly for the Germans and so food and fuel were more in short supply than ever. Family story has it that he did take part in the Great March back into Germany ahead of the advancing Russians. However, the War Ministry documentation suggests that he was in the camp hospital on 27 Jan 1945, when the march started. We presume that he was liberated by the US 14th Armored division on 29 April 1945. (Note – still not clear if this is the case, since much of the history talks of the US liberating those who

had left the camp on the Great March).

In one of the documents from WW2, there is the statement "Don't talk to me about Blenheims" as a catch phrase for WFJ.

He said little about the war, and his wife died in 1967. There were no children so much of what is here is gleaned from public record rather than personal account. We do know that just before he died in 1984, there were some initial discussions with the producers of "This is your life" as he clearly acted as a father figure to the younger airmen in the POW camp, and I think he was much respected for this.

When my parents cleared his house after his death they recovered a blanket which must have been sent to him while he was in Germany. We know nothing about the blanket from Will other than him telling the family that it "saved my life". The blanket has "W F JACKMAN 1389 IX A/H" on it. The number "1389" is his Red Cross POW number, and IX A/H presumably refers to his first Oflag camp, in other words he had it less than 3 months from his capture. Kate may have been responsible for the blanket, but this implies things were sorted quickly and so perhaps this was a blanket delivered by the Red Cross to the Oflag camp and on which Will sewed his details. The Red Cross did though encourage friends and relatives to make blankets, and perhaps Kate would have been worried about Will and therefore she could have made this quickly. I think therefore that it did stay with him and came back with him following his liberation.

Sources:-

<https://www.forgottenairfields.com/airfield-schellingwoude-756.html> (ref the time at Amsterdam)

Much of the information about the time as a POW comes from <https://kenfentonswar.com>

Ministry of War documents, TNA.