

AWM 65

[414]

BRICKHILL, PAUL CHESTER JEROME

403313

AUSTRALIAN ARCHIVES
ACCESS STATUS

OPEN

send to RAAF Overseas HQ London

Missing 17/3/43
POW 21/4/43
Safe OK 10-5-45

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

OFFICERS & AIR CREWS

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, LONDON.

SURNAME. BRICKHILL.....NUMBER. 403313

CHRISTIAN NAMES. PAUL CHESTER JEROME.....

AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING. PILOT OFFICER (PILOT) FLT.....

DEGREES, DECORATIONS ETC.....

PRESENT APPOINTMENT AND LOCATION No. 24 Squadron, LONG KESH, N. IRELAND

DATE OF BIRTH. 20.12.16.....PLACE. MELBOURNE.....

EDUCATED. NORTH SYDNEY HIGH SCHOOL, SYDNEY UNIVERSITY.....

DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE. 6.1.41.....

PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE. 3 years No. 7 Fd Bde RAAF (M).....

PLACES OF TRAINING BRADFIELD PARK, NARRANDERRA (N.S.W.) OTTAWA, CANADA.....
(2 SETS)

CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES. JOURNALIST AVIATION & Defence
Reporter on "Sydney Sun".....

SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED), RECREATIONS, CLUBS ETC. Squash, Golf,
Swimming.....

FATHER. G. R. BRICKHILL.....

WIFE.....

CHILDREN.....

HOME ADDRESS. 132 Greenwich Rd, Greenwich, N.S.W. Austr.

SIGNATURE Brickhill.....

DATE 28.2.45.....

DATE EMBARKED 20.5.41 | 9.9.41.....

DESTINATION. Ottawa | Bournemouth

(These forms are to be filled in and handed to the Adjutant of the Unit immediately after receipt).

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE.

PRO. FORM.

P/R. 5.

Overseas Headquarters,
Kodak House,
Kingsway, W.C.2.SECRET & CONFIDENTIAL.

The following biographical details are required for R.A.A.F.

Historical Records, Overseas Headquarters. These forms are to be filled in and returned to the Officer Commanding Repatriation Disposal Section, No.11 (R.A.A.F.) P.D.R.C.

NAME (in full) Paul CHESTER JEROME BRICKHILL NUMBER Aus 403313
 RANK AND MUSTERING F/Lt Pilot DECORATIONS —
 NUMBER I.T.S. COURSE 10 O.T.U. - A.P.U. etc.
 DATE LEFT AUSTRALIA } 20/5/41
 CANADA } 10/9/41 DATE OF ARRIVAL U.K. 26/9/41
 Sth. AFRICA }
 SQUADRONS 74, ~~374~~, 451, 127, 274, 92
 AIRCRAFT FLOWN Fige. Not. Howard, Avon, Magister, Spitfire, Hurricane
 COMMAND & TYPE OF ACTIVITY Fighter & fighter bomber
 OPERATIONS OR TRAINING WITH AMERICAN PERSONNEL, SQUADRONS, OR AIRCRAFT —

DETAILS OF OPERATIONS - with dates: to be given as fully as possible under the following applicable headings:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| (a) Number Operational Hours | (b) Number Operational Sorties, Day-night. |
| (c) Targets attacked. | (d) Attacks on enemy surface vessels - type, size, etc. |
| (e) Attacks on enemy submarines. | (e) Outstanding sorties or incidents. |
| (f) Combats with enemy aircraft. | (f) Personnel in Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, Transport Command, etc., should give a brief report of their work. |
| (g) Other Australians in crews. | |

(a) 55 (b) 34 day, 1 night, (c) transport concentration
 & enemy fighters (d) — (e) — (f) Various (g) —
 (h) —

DATE 12/3/46SIGNATURE Brickhill

(use other side, or attach extra sheets, if necessary)

"ANZACS CALLING"'Tunnel Escape from Stalag Luft 3'

by

(403313)

F/Lt. P.C.J. Brickhill R.A.A.F.

PRODUCED BY MRS. E.J. DAVY
 CENSORED BY G. LOCKER AND J. STURGES-WHITING
 PASSED BY AIR MINISTRY PB.

Recorded on DOX 50148

Transmission: Pacific Service, Thursday June 7th 1945,

Duration 9'40"

0615-0625 GRT

OPENING ANNOUNCEMENT:

This is London calling in the Pacific Service of the B.B.C. "ANZACS CALLING". You will remember the attempted mass escape last year from Stalag Luft 3, at Seagen, near Berlin, after which 50 recaptured officers were shot by the Germans. F/Lt. P.C.J. Brickhill, a Spitfire pilot from Sydney, has just been released from that camp. Before the war Paul Brickhill was on the editorial staff of the Sydney "Sun", and in this talk he describes the building of the tunnel through which the break was made.

F/Lt. BRICKHILL:

Yes, I was in that camp, but now I find it hard to believe all the fantastic things that happened.

You see, it was no simple tunnel. It was...well, there were three tunnels, the work of what was called the "X" organisation - the work of 500 men for 15 months. We carried out the whole show in a pretty barren compound about 350 yards square swarming with German security guards night and day, searching and snooping with probes and torches. As well as the tunnels, we had to organise factories for mass forgery, map and compass making, for producing iron rations, tailoring, carpentry and metal-work shops, all part of the scheme for the big escape. We had to use a couple of hundred sentries to conceal our operations and the fact that we got away with it was largely due to a genius, known as "Big X" who organised it all. He had commanded the R.A.F.'s top scoring fighter squadron till he was shot down over the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940. He was among those the Gestapo shot.

The three tunnels were always called Tom, Dick and Harry for security reasons, and Harry, our last chance, was the one that rang the bell. It was over 350 feet long, a world's prison camp record, and 30 feet deep to evade the sound detectors sunk by the Germans around our beloved barbed wire. Eighty officers got out through Harry, another world's record I think.

We began planning the big break about Christmas 1942. Six months later the boys had Tom, our first tunnel, about 300 feet long and were about to dig up, out and away, when Hermann, one of the ferrets as we called the German security guards, accidentally dug his probe - iron spike - into the invisible edge of Tom's trap door, and that was the end of Tom.

After that blow, we found that Dick was unsuitable because the Germans suddenly cut down the wood where it was to come up, and built another compound there, so early in January last year, work went full steam ahead on Harry. The entrance to Harry was a cunning trap door in a room that the Germans searched at least six times, looking for just that sort of thing, but they never found Harry's modest portals. They were underneath the stove in a corner of the room; we'd taken a square of tiles out of the floor there, fitted them into a concrete tray, so that the whole lot lifted out cleanly in one piece - and it was so well done that you couldn't see the edges. Under this we

dig a shaft that dropped straight down for 30 feet. It was all wood-lined and shored, and so, incidentally, was the tunnel. To do this we stripped all the beds in the camp of some of their cross slats - there were about 1500 beds - and we stripped certain other places too. It made for rather uncomfortable sleeping, but what of that? Thirty feet down we dug out an underground pumping chamber, designed and built an air pump and snuggled it down. From old tins we made an air pipe-line that had a secret intake in a disused chimney and was taken along with a transmittable nozzle, foot by foot as the tunnel progressed, buried under the railway tracks on the tunnel floor.

Oh yes, about this railway. We also dug an underground workshop where we assembled wooden frames for shoring the tunnel and built wooden railway lines and trolleys with flanged and metal tyrod wheels for tunnel transport. It was in three sections - you had to change trucks twice to get the full length of the tunnel - the trucks were hauled backwards and forwards by a rope.

The tunnel itself was about two feet square - pretty cramped for working in - and the boys digging used to work naked or in the hated long undershirts. Clothes would have hampered them, and dirt stains would have given the show away, but it was easy for them to slip round to a bathroom where we'd rigged up a shower and wash the sand off their bodies and out of their hair. One lad, lying full length, hauled away at the sand and while his No. 2 lying just behind, passed it back on the railway. Nearly every day, owing to the loose sand, there were dangerous falls at the face which held up work badly. The only warning would be a slight rustle and then No. 1 digger would be buried under feet of suffocating sand, fallen from the roof. Our home-made lamps and airline would be smothered, and No. 2 working fast would have to find his pal's feet in inky blackness, and haul him back out from under.

Getting rid of the sand was one of our biggest difficulties, especially after it began to snow. One of it we put down Dick (the unfinished tunnel), and we put a lot under the camp theatre.

Meaning, up above, hundreds of our own sentries - we called them stooges - were safeguarding our secret activities. All the snooping German ferrets were tailed. They couldn't move a foot without their actions being flashed to our various control points.

Tunnelling work was eventually helped when one rather light fingered officer - "picked up" about 600 feet of electric cable and we installed very push electric lighting in Harry. Three German workmen were shot by their own people for their carelessness in losing that wire.

Over 200 chaps were picked by secret ballot to attempt the escape. The date wasn't fixed in advance and it was only on the morning of March 24th that it was decided to break the tunnel that night. The chaps concerned assembled in Harry's hut. They had about 400 forged papers, civvy clothes, maps compasses, iron rations made from our own recipes - and not had either - plus other odd gadgets. A highly unfriendly country under a foot of snow was at the other end of the tunnel.

About 10 p.m. two experienced tunnellers dug out the last few inches into the open. They had a nasty shock. Calculations were a few feet short, and instead of being just inside a wood, they were on the edge, in the open, and a bare 15 yards from a German sentry box and searchlight. After that the tension was slightly terrific as the chaps, quivering with excitement, muffled in heavy clothes with bulging pockets, and blankets trapped around them, clambered on the trolleys one at a time, and went shooting off towards freedom. There were inevitable complications. Several people were stuck in the tunnel because of all their bulging paraphernalia. This sort of thing caused a couple of nasty falls of sand which blocked the tunnel, nearly buried the lads and had to be cleared under pretty nerve-racking conditions. In the middle of it all our former colleagues in the R.A.F. arrived over Berlin on business. The sirens went; the hut shook with the bombs and out went the electric lights in the tunnel. That caused a lovely shambles, and completely held up operations while our lamps, held ready for an emergency, were brought out and passed down the shaft and up to the two half-way houses in the tunnel. Getting the chaps out with all these complications was a slower business than intended. Outside the tunnel mouth and just inside the fringe of the wood we had a stooge controlling the evacuation by rope signals.

/About

About five to five it was starting to get light and the controllers decided to pack up. The last man was just shooting off down the tunnel when a German patrolling sentry walked along the edge of the wood, stopped a foot from the tunnel mouth - almost fell down the thing } - DIDN'T SEE IT -- practically trod on one quaking escapee lying doggo in the snow just out of the hole -- DIDN'T SEE HIM EITHER -- but DID see another led crawling about 30 yards away. The guard let out a howl, fired a shot that luckily missed, and the game was up. Within half an hour there was chaos in the camp; hordes of Germans with tommy guns, ferrets with drawn revolvers and the Kommandant, (a lovely sight, his face a sort of settled puce), threatening to shoot two British officers himself on any provocation. He narrowly missed being shot later by his own people. He was court-martialled and given a pretty stiff sentence.

Of the 80 who went out through the tunnel, four were caught immediately. One by one, most of the others were rounded up, frost-bitten and completely exhausted. Three out of the 80 got back to England -- some are still missing.

It was about a fortnight after the break, our new Kommandant told us that the 50 had been shot --- attempting, he said, to evade capture. I suppose the Germans thought the shooting would stop our escaping attempts, though if they did think that, I can only say they'd have got a pretty hefty shock if they'd seen the next tunnel we built. Honestly it was a beauty, but we were evacuated from the camp before we could finish it. And now I hope we're through with tunnels for good. I'd much rather take a bus.

CLOSING ANNOUNCEMENT;

That was P/Lt. Paul Brickhill R.A.A.F. of Sydney who was recently repatriated from Stalag Luft 3, Germany. P/Lt. Brickhill is writing a book in collaboration with a South African war correspondent about the extraordinary escapes from death of some of his fellow prisoners when they baled out or were shot down.

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(403313) F/Lt. P.C.J. Brickhill R.A.A.F.

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