

Paul Brickhill on Escapes

THE DAM BUSTERS, story of the R.A.F.'s famous 617 Squadron, has proved one of the most popular war books so far published. It has gone into several editions, has been adapted for broadcasting, and is now being filmed with Richard Todd as Wing Commander Guy Gibson in the leading role. Paul Brickhill, who wrote *The Dam Busters*, has been touring New Zealand in the past few weeks. In Auckland, he was buttonholed by an interviewer from 12B and asked to broadcast from the studio. We print below extracts from the interview he gave.

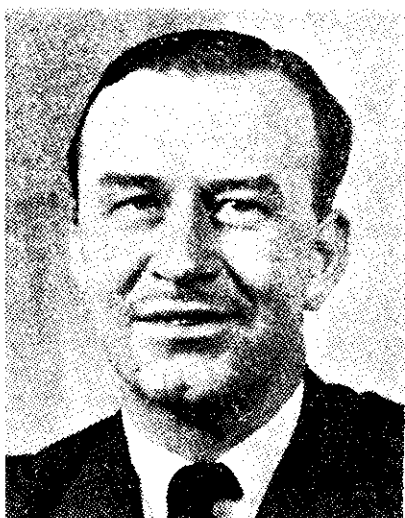
"I think the story of *The Dam Busters*, started with some German pilot I never even saw, who shot me down in 1943," he said. "That really started me writing, first of all in prison camp, and in 1949 the Vice Chief of Air Staff, Sir Ralph Cochrane, asked if I would write on the dam busters."

Brickhill had written two books before he took on the story of 617 Squadron. One dealt with some of the war's incredible escapes from what appeared certain death, and the other with the great break-out of prisoners from Stalag Luft 13.

"This is how it happened. A hundred thousand people were shot down during the war and 10,000 got away alive. In that 10,000 you will find quite a few people who had some pretty weird escapes. . . . There was a fellow called Alkemade who was the rear gunner in a Lancaster, which was set on fire by a night fighter. Their position was about 17,000 feet over the Ruhr, and Sergeant Alkemade, with his clothes and flying jacket on fire, reached inside the fuselage for his parachute. This was in flames, too, but anyway he thought it better to hop out into the cool air. He turned the turret round on to the beam and jumped. He passed out then and didn't come to till much later—after he'd landed.

"How this happened is that the human body can fall no faster than 119 miles an hour, because of the resistance of the air, and he must have come down at about that speed. He went through tops of a forest of pine trees which broke his fall, and then fell into a very thick snow drift. When he woke up all he had was a sore knee and a bump on the head. The Germans wouldn't believe him when they found him—they thought he was some kind of espionage agent—but he said, 'If you can find my parachute I shall be most surprised.' They looked, and, of course, couldn't find it anywhere. The rider straps of his harness were still clipped down, so he couldn't have used it. They gave him a certificate to say this had actually happened.

"I started writing these stories while still in prison camp, leaving blank spaces here and there where I was going to say something rude. We managed to hide the manuscript in secret wall panels and things, and took it on the refugee marches. As a matter of fact, I almost threw it away when we were pretty hungry so as to carry more food. You know, morale low, feeling pretty grim



PAUL BRICKHILL

... but I threw away some of the food and kept the manuscript. Once when we were being pushed into a new camp and being searched as we went, a guard said to me, 'what have you got in the blanket roll?' and I said 'tommy-gun,' so he just laughed and I walked on."

Later, back in England, Brickhill finished off this manuscript, then worked as a journalist for three or four years before going home to Australia and writing *The Great Escape*. With 75 others, he had worked on the escape tunnel at Stalag Luft 13, but on the day of the mass break-out could not get through the tunnel. It was perhaps just as well, because 50 men were shot by the Gestapo as a reprisal.

"When I got through with this story, Sir Ralph Cochrane asked if I thought I could do a story on the dam busters and the air force gave me a lot of background material for it. But they could only give cold facts and figures. I managed to get hold of some actual survivors, though. There are a few of these, and I spent eight months going around seeing them and getting them to talk, taking notes, and getting the stories of those who had actually been there at the time.

"There are not very many left now. Guy Gibson was killed in 1944. Les Cheshire (who succeeded Gibson as leader of 617 Squadron) is very ill in hospital in England. I haven't heard from him for months—I'm not sure how he is getting on. M. Martin, an Australian, having served time as R.A.F. attaché in Israel, is back in England. One chap I haven't heard from is Les Munro, who is a New Zealander and was one of the four who were the real backbone of the squadron. I think he's farming somewhere in the North Island."

The serial version of *The Dam Busters* is at present playing from 12B and 22B at 7.0 p.m. on Saturdays. It will begin from 32B and 42B on May 29 and end June 26 respectively, not on the dates previously announced.



N.Z. LISTENER, MAY 21, 1954.

TESTS PROVE NEW METHOD WASHES GREASIEST DISHES WITH HALF the EFFORT, HALF the TIME

Until you've used **BLISS** Detergent for the dishes you just don't know how easy the greasiest of wash-ups can be! Test after test, carried out in ordinary homes by housewives just like yourself, proved that **BLISS** does away with drying by cloth altogether and halves the time spent in actual washing. These tests also proved that much less than half the effort goes into the whole job when **BLISS** is used.

No wonder they call **BLISS** "the magic wash"! This is all you need do the very first wash-up after you have **BLISS** in the house. Shake into the water a few drops through the new sprinkler economy top. Then just

pick the dishes out of the warm water and stand in a rack to dry quickly. How they'll gleam and sparkle without your putting a tea-towel near them. Lovely china looks lovelier. All silver and glassware looks brighter, because it's cleaner. Everything scintillates with a new cleanliness. **BLISS** works the same magic with nylon, silks, woollies, babies' napkins and clothes, and other dainties, too. The half-crown bottle is available from every grocer, chemist, department store or chain store (country districts slightly higher price). You are bound to try **BLISS**, the sensational household detergent that supersedes soap. Why not now!

2.4A

'BLISS WASHES WOOLLIES SOFTER, FLUFFIER THAN NEW,' SAYS ELIZABETH



'BLISS CUTS GREASE COMPLETELY—LEAVES DISHES SPARKLING,' SAYS MRS. DOROTHY M.



'I GAVE MY HUSBAND A TIP ABOUT CAR WASHING,' SAYS MRS. L.B. 'PUT A LITTLE BLISS IN THE WATER AND WHAT A SHINE!'



Be safe now from winter COLDS...

A 3-day course of Anti-Bi-San now can help you and your family to safeguard yourselves from colds. Anti-Bi-San acts through the bloodstream and reinforces your natural resistance during the treacherous winter months. Let Anti-Bi-San protect you against infection this winter. In the great majority of cases Anti-Bi-San provides protection against colds within 10 days of the start of treatment.

'ANTI-BI-SAN'

Guards against Colds

OBTAINABLE IN ADULTS' AND CHILDREN'S PACKS

Send for Free Leaflet to the Distributors:

FASSETT & JOHNSON LTD., 89 Courtenay Place, Wellington.