

# Book Reviews

## SHOT DOWN AND ON THE RUN

### The RAF and Commonwealth aircrews who got home from behind enemy lines 1940-1945

By Air Commodore Graham Pitchfork RAF (Ret'd)

Price: £19.99

ISBN: 1-903365-53-8

Format: Hardback, 102 illustrations, 320pp

Publisher: The National Archives, Kew, Surrey

Reviewed by Wing Commander Julian Spencer

This new offering from Graham Pitchfork chronicles real-life stories of escape, evasion and ultimate rescue of Commonwealth airmen ensnared behind enemy lines during World War II. The book is divided into four parts, the first of which provides a fascinating insight into the role of the Military Intelligence body MI9, the escape and evasion training that the aircrew undertook and the escape aids they used. The subsequent three chapters, the bulk of the book, recount the individual escape stories of 29 airmen operating over the wide range of operational theatres of Western Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. The accounts have been carefully selected to illustrate the wide disparities between, and the unique peculiarities of, the environment and cultures that the three distinct theatres of war presented to the evading airmen.

In his Preface, Graham regales his own boyhood memories of reading escape and evasion books such as *Colditz* and *The Great Escape*. Such literary memories of courage, ingenuity, adventure and downright derring-do are ones to which we can all relate from our own childhoods. However, those books along with many others were written at a time when extant security constraints meant that certain escape and evasion ploys could not be mentioned. Graham's book is not so constrained. It draws on previously unpublished historical documents held and now released at Kew and

personal accounts given through interviews with the war veterans themselves.

The old adage that truth is often stranger than fiction is amply borne out by this publication. The extraordinary anecdotes transcend the imaginations of even the most accomplished of fiction writers. Indeed, this is a book that refreshingly makes no attempt to reconstruct historical fact as story. It is an unadulterated compendium of real-life stories that leaves the reader eager to turn the page to discover the next daring escapade.

While all 29 of the escape and evasion chronicles share — as one would expect — common threads of fortitude, courage and steadfastness, there are also the personal tales that encapsulate the extent of human resolve when faced with dire adversity.

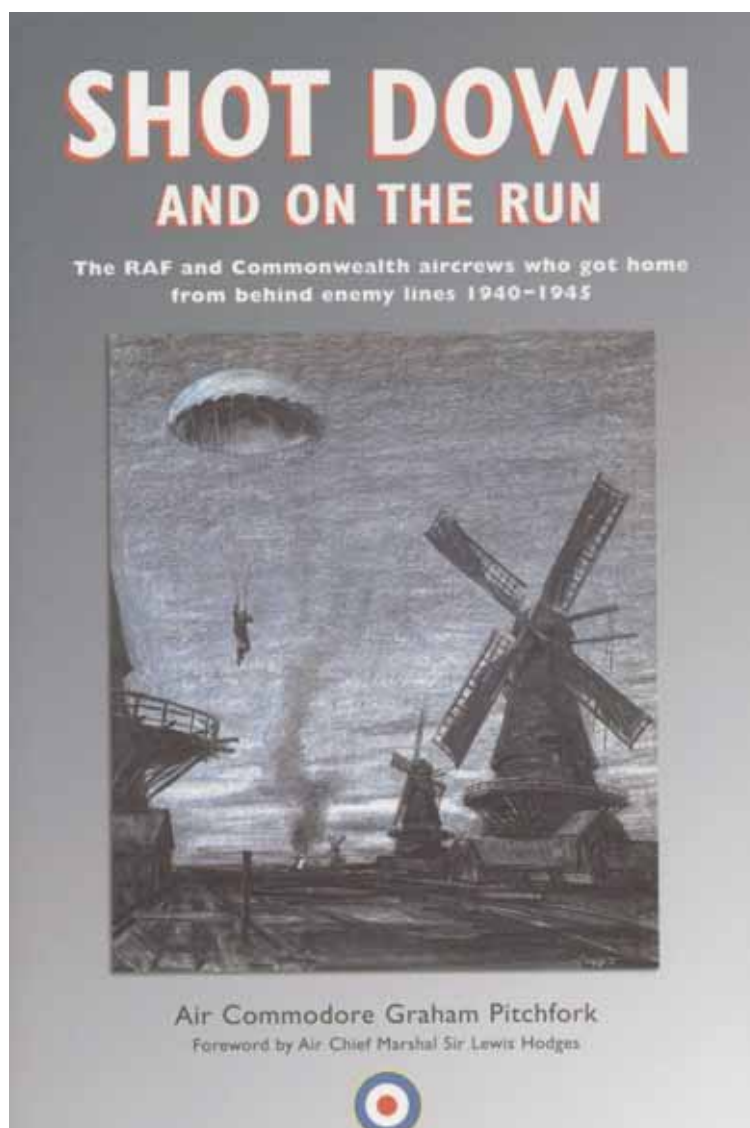
There is Flying Officer Maurice Garlick, a Lancaster navigator who, having had to bail out at night over enemy territory, suffered the further agonising ignominy of parachuting into a high-tension power cable. "He was in great pain, with both legs useless, there was a strong sense of burnt flesh. His right leg was paralysed and burnt from below the ankle to the calf. His left leg was also very badly burnt. He cut off his flying boots and started to bandage his legs with strips of parachute." Garlick survived to tell the tale.

Then there is the Halifax pilot, Flight Lieutenant Julian Sale, who, despite being literally blown out of his aircraft by an explosion, still managed to parachute to safety albeit into the top of a pine tree. He subsequently walked and cycled over 1,000 miles to avoid capture. The exploits of Garlick, Sale and their fellow evaders make compelling reading.

# Book Reviews

Finally, and most importantly, this book is not all about the daring exploits of Commonwealth airmen, impressive as they are. This publication rightly pays all due deference to the extraordinary courage, sacrifice and selflessness of the many remarkable people who assisted our aircrew

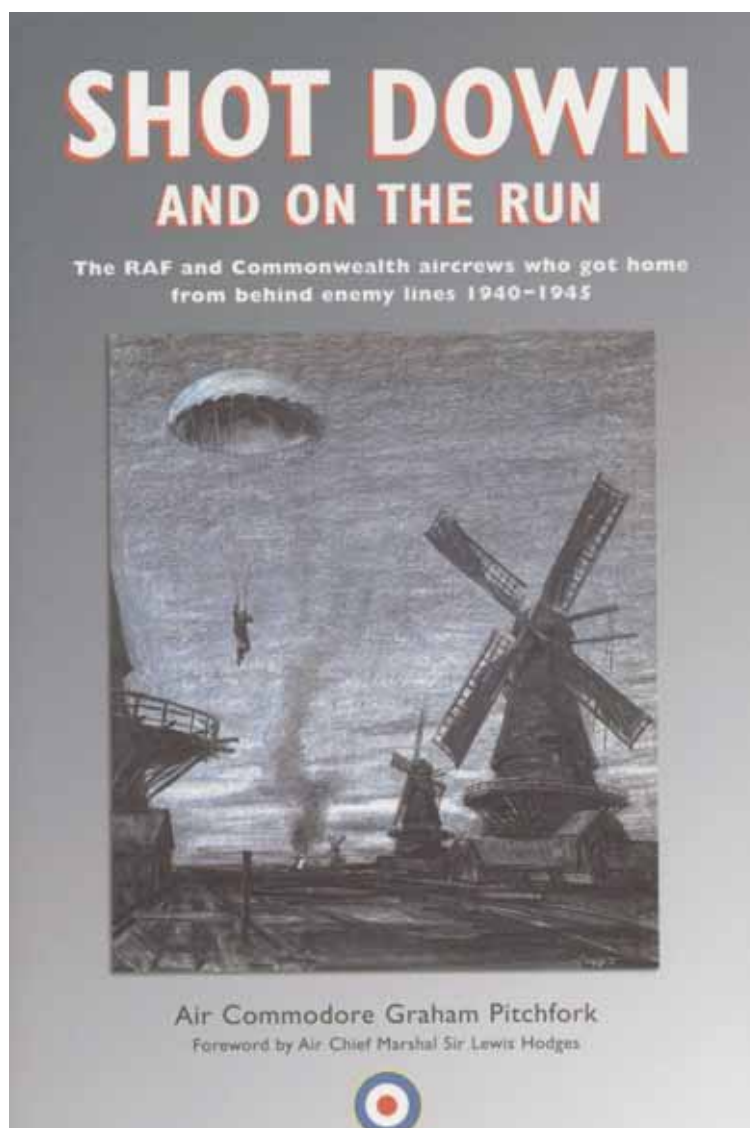
forebears to avoid capture, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice for their patriotism. Those cloak-and-dagger protagonists of the underground resistance organisations are the outstanding heroes of Graham's inspiring new book.



# Book Reviews

Finally, and most importantly, this book is not all about the daring exploits of Commonwealth airmen, impressive as they are. This publication rightly pays all due deference to the extraordinary courage, sacrifice and selflessness of the many remarkable people who assisted our aircrew

forebears to avoid capture, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice for their patriotism. Those cloak-and-dagger protagonists of the underground resistance organisations are the outstanding heroes of Graham's inspiring new book.



## **This article has been republished online with Open Access.**

Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright 2023. The full printed text of this article is licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/>. Where we have identified any third-party copyright information or otherwise reserved rights, you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. For all other imagery and graphics in this article, or for any other enquires regarding this publication, please contact: Director of Defence Studies (RAF), Cormorant Building (Room 119), Shrivenham, Swindon, Wiltshire SN6 8LA.

 **ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**  
**Centre for Air and  
Space Power Studies**

**OGL**