

“THE FEW”.

Roy Gault

Jeff Turnbull pointed me to this cover which appeared on e-Bay in December 2019 - it's a bit smudged and indistinctly cancelled, but it does have one 'all important' virtue! Along with an un-perfined 9p Machin, it also bears a ½p stamp perforated with “**THE/FEW**”, a *previously unknown Perfin*. Although indistinct, the dates on the two cancels are for the 15th September 1979 - 'Battle of Britain' Day.



The user was clearly 'The Royal Air Force Museum' at Hendon, but what more can we discover about a Perfin that has taken *forty years* to surface? Fortunately, the seller volunteered a little more information.

*You may be interested to know the handwriting on the letter is that of **Group Captain W S O (Bill) Randle** who for many years worked on fundraising for RAF charities and the RAF Museum Hendon.*

Although not a Perfin in the strict sense of the word, as it's not likely to have been applied to postage stamps to *deter theft*, it would almost certainly have been used as some sort of advertisement or promotion in one or more of the various fundraising campaigns undertaken for RAF charities, for example the '*RAF Escaping Society*'.



In this particular case, we're told that the letter was written by **Group Captain W S O Randle**, and so it's highly likely that he applied the stamps himself to the envelope. A little research reveals that Bill Randle (1921-2012) was a WWII hero! Bill wrote an autobiography, so only a few bullet points have been shown here.

- William Samuel Oliver Randle, was born in Devon on 17th May 1921. He attended Exmouth Grammar School before joining Lloyds Bank.
- He joined the RAF in February 1941, and trained as a pilot. Then, in July 1942, he joined 150 Squadron, based in Yorkshire, as a sergeant pilot to fly the Wellington bomber. He had just turned 21 years of age!
- On the night of 16th September 1942, Randle took off (on his 19th mission) to attack Essen, but crossing the Dutch coast at 21,000ft his Wellington took a direct hit from anti-aircraft fire. Despite damage to his aircraft he pressed on to the target, where he came under more intense fire. After dropping his bombs, he was hit again and the port engine failed. With the Wellington becoming increasingly difficult to control, he ordered his crew to bale out.
- Randle landed in a tree near the German-Belgian border and immediately headed for the coast, travelling by night and hiding by day. Over the course of **55** days he was sheltered by Monks, passed on to the Belgian Resistance and taken to Brussels, kept in 'safe houses', transferred to Paris, and then (by express train) to Biarritz, across into Spain and on to Madrid before travelling to Gibraltar (and relative safety), then home to 'Blighty'.
- Randle was awarded an immediate **DFM**, the citation stating that he had
“carried out all his attacks with persistent skill and courage and shown superb captaincy and airmanship”.
- It was Air Ministry policy that successful 'evaders' would not return to operational flying over north-west Europe, and as a result, Randle became an instructor at a bomber training unit.
- In later life he established a programme of first-day philatelic covers signed by RAF dignitaries, a project which proved highly successful over the years.



A bonus with the e-Bay lot was a **mint strip of six!** Inspection of each pattern shows minute differences, pointing to a multi-headed die.