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Roland Stewart

(Stories 26, 27)

OPTION # 1

(O.K. to Check-out & O.K to Make Copies)

FROM ROLAND STEWART

#26

Dec 14-00

Dear Roland -

as usual I am always glad to hear from you and Verna.

I ate you stay busy.

I am copying my ninth mission Feb. 15, 1945

Magdeburg / Hermann  
woke up at 0340 hours - ate at  
0400 hours - briefed at 0500 hours  
took off at 0730 hrs. - Flew with  
Lt. Van Hinkel & Crew. Flew as  
waist gunner. Carried 12-500 lb.  
bombs. Briefed for oil  
installation & Clear Weather Had to  
bomb P.F.F. Hit target. Flak  
moderate & inaccurate. Saw  
224 trucks in England. On target  
& hrs - Flew 6 hrs. Temperature - 28  
Aot back about 1430 hours.

OUR PILOT -

I flew as spare gunner  
& with 14 different crews to get  
to fly all positions at least once.

The first crew I lived with (where we were) went down the next day in combat & then your crew came. I remember your pilot lost his life in training & Lt. Van Hinkel took over. When we were at reunion in England one Lt. (a Navigator I believe) who escaped out a waist window was there but know of others if any got out of The Mid air Collision.

Well enough at odd times. I had you filled me in on your crew. You all seemed to get along well.

Always remember Jay swiping ice cream with his cup from the lady fastours when they were taking it to the officers mess.

Best wishes & you are always welcome —  
Keith & Mary Lee



cially when a syrupy-voiced woman propagandist addresses us young, brave, American yankees and British tommies to get across that we're dying for a Jewish-Bolshevik international alliance. They play good American records, though they're all a little aged.

OUR 1ST PILOT

X16 September 1944 PILOT PAUL DICICLIANIAN KILLED  
IN CRASH

The group was Stood Down again today—so a practice mission. We'll begin with Frank Spurlock's-562R account:

Today our crew was taken off the night program entirely. We've missed a couple of days of practice flying because of that night deal, unfortunately. Today the pilot (Reynolds) went up as a passenger in a practice flight. Two planes collided, went down . . . We heard that the tail of one was broken off.

Baynes-731P wrote: "Flew as Instructor Pilot in (position) #2. Saw #1 and #3 collide in formation accident." John Blumenstock-652P adds:

I can only remember (a plane) up too high and knocked off his horizontal and both vertical stabilizers. I remember seeing the entire assembly, still intact as if someone had simply unbolted it from the top of the fuselage, flying off the a/c. From then on everything that happened was behind and below me.

Francis L. Bell and his crew-754 (only seven of the crew were flying the mission) were flying in the #3 position off of the left wing of the lead ship. Elmore Cave, copilot on this new crew was doing most of the flying as the action was on his side. Reports indicate that due to turbulence the plane dropped down. It appears that Cave recovered too quickly, striking the lead ship. Captain Bell reported:

I simply could not respond quickly enough to salvage the situation. (After the collision) the controls indicated that our aircraft had lost its tail or control cables since the controls in the tail would not respond and the aircraft was in a flat spin. I pushed the bailout button. Elmore did not respond so I got out of my seat and forced him out of his seat. Then the wild gyrations forced me to the front of the cockpit and against the throttles. The violent surge of the aircraft threw me to the floor and I had to crawl by "brute" strength to the bomb bay. My copilot was standing over the opened bomb bay but would not bail out. I had to kick him out . . . he didn't survive. I don't know why. Perhaps because he was left handed—awkward to release a right handed chute.

. . . so I jumped. As I fell, I pulled on the rip cord (back pack) at least nine times without success. It appeared for an eternity that my parachute would never open. The ground kept coming closer and closer. With a desperation pull and after a free fall of 15,000 feet or more it finally opened.

The combat-seasoned Williams Crew-736 (15 missions) were leading the formation. They had Major John O. Cockey (the new CO of the 787th BS) on board. John was the Command pilot for this squadron of planes. Also on board were several pilots from other crews as observers. Lt. Stuart M. Peace was one of the passengers in the lead ship, here is his story:

The Group Commander decided to send the crews up to get some practice in close formation—especially for the new arrivals who didn't know what close meant. My copilot, Fred Deck, and I were assigned to observe from the waist windows in the lead plane . . . We were briefed to observe and give a critique of the formation following the mission.

Things were going along normally and the formation had just made a simulated bomb run on Kings Lynn, heading south, and had turned east toward the Rally Point. About ten or eleven aircraft were in our squadron formation. We encountered turbulence from the squadron ahead and the left wing plane in the lead element dropped low . . . We were in a left turn and the left lead plane began to come back up rapidly under the lead plane (which I was in) and made contact, not too severely, but enough to cause both to lose control and go down spinning. This happened at about 22,000 feet.

I was wearing a chute harness for a chest pack which was stowed beneath the left waist window. Just after impact I was thrown to the left side near the waist window and almost over the floor hatch which I had managed to open an instant before we collided. The out-of-control condition pinned me to the left fuselage as I struggled to reach my chest pack by walking my fingers to the web strap on the chute. I finally took hold of the chute and dragged it to my lap, but could not lift it to attach it to the hooks on my harness. Neither could I shift my weight to get out that opened floor hatch.

Suddenly and miraculously, the whole tail section departed the fuselage immediately adjacent to where I was pinned. I was able to turn and squirm out the big opening, still hanging on to the chest pack. Free of the aircraft, it was an easy matter to hook the chute to the harness and pull the ripcord.

When the chute opened, I must have been still at about 20,000 feet as it took something like ten minutes to reach the ground. I observed two other chutes descending below me and a lot of debris in the air. The two planes were spinning below and finally hit the ground in two big orange balls of fire, seconds apart. It turned out that three people got out of that other plane (Pilot Bell; Engineer Sgt. Courser; and Radio Operator Sgt. Bauman). I was the only one to escape the plane I was in . . .



When I finally reached the ground it was a plowed field next to a P-51 fighter base called Bodney. There I met the other survivors, phoned Attlebridge to report what happened, and waited to be transported back by truck to the home base. Doc Hoff confined us to the dispensary until the next day. None of the survivors sustained any injury that I recall. We were sent to the Norfolk Broads rest home for a few days.



Garlichs-754R, Courser-754E, Bell-754P, Peace-732P—Mid-air survivors behind Base Hospital on 17 August 1944

British Historian Stewart P. Evans (of Bury St. Edmunds) fills in some information from "official British reports":

These two B-24's collided at 4:30 in the afternoon and they crashed at Gooderstone, Norfolk, about 12 miles southeast of Kings Lynn and 26 miles west-southwest of Attlebridge. The wrecked planes were burnt out. The British report also states that the crews totaled twenty-one—four injured, twelve killed and five missing (found later, dead).

McConnell tells me that Major Cockey fell out of his chute when it opened.

Dr. Hoff (787th Surgeon) wrote this in his diary:

Two of my planes ran together on a practice mission today at 20,000 feet. One boy grabbed his chute and jumped. Put it on on the way down and was saved. Three others got out about the same way, but the rest, I guess were killed. Can't find them all—scattered over a ten mile area they are.

(18 Sept) Found them all but one now. Sure tough. John Cockey was aboard and was killed. Sure tough.

The mother of LeRoy F. Hurst-736B has sent a note written by a long time friend of LeRoy. "He belongs to another Air Corps now with the greatest of all Com-

manders, and we know that LeRoy will still carry out commissions assigned to him and do it in a big way."

There were 21 men on those two planes, 17 died.

The 466th Medical History had these comments:

This tragedy, coming as it did, on a practice mission, was a tremendous jolt to the morale of the Squadron. This incident, however, proved to be an interesting study in psychology. Approximately three days were required for the personnel to snap out of the depths of their depression.

On 18 September Capt. John Jennison assumed command of the 787th (promoted to Major on the 24th). Capt. John J. Remillet was appointed Operations Officer for the 787th.

### 17 September 1944

Baynes recorded that he "fixed bike and made sling-shot" on this date.

The Weather History included this note, "on 17 Sept. tanks were installed in the bomb bays of the planes and plans made to load and fly the planes from this base direct to France."

### 18 September 1944

Dick Baynes-731P wrote: "Alerted and briefed for gas trucking mission to Clastres—scrubbed."

Doc Hoff (787th Flt Surg) made these notes on this day: "Steady (Col. Steadman) is leaving, Josh (Maj. Childs) is leaving, Eddie Cooper too, maybe Joe West. The old gang is gradually going. We stand pretty well (with) the new boss. John Jennison is my new C.O.—good!" Those leaving were: Major Beverly E. Steadman (Deputy C.O.—replaced by Lt. Col. Gibson E. Sisco, Jr., who was replaced as C.O. of the 784th BS by Maj. Leslie M. Thompson); Major Josiah H. Child, (Group S-2—replacement unknown); Major Edwin B. Cooper (Group adjutant—he didn't leave until the first of November—replaced by Major George C. Dudley, who came from the 2nd AD Hq.); and Lt. Col. Joseph H. West (Group Exec) who never left—ever. Doc Hoff failed to note that this major shakeup of the group brass included Major Edward P. Anastasio, (Group Opns), who was replaced by Major James B. Patterson of 2AD Hq—he flew a tour with the 93rd BG. At the same time Catholic Chaplain Joseph G. Cole was "transferred due to physical breakdown" (according to the 61st SC History) and replaced by Chaplain John J. Collins.

Mario Munafoe, 785th Crew Chief, recalls the gas missions:

Each crew was assigned three a/c, war weary jobs. The three of us on the crew would (each morning) pull the props through, start up, run up, and check out whatever was needed. One of the crew would stay with the a/c and complete the adjustment or repair while the others moved on to the other a/c.