

Chariots of Thunder



Air, Land & Sea

More Tales of true-life heroism mystery, and combat from WW2

by

JDBB & Paul Allonby.



This edition of *Chariots of Thunder* has been updated to include references to the Naval Constituency, and this new-look book also includes stories about HMS Formidable, PT boats, and those 'Spitfires of the Sea', the MTBs.

Many men took chariots to destinations of battle to save the world, some of their stories will be told. Stories of the Pacific campaigns and the battles; of arctic convoys bringing food; of submarine patrols. They are stories of bravery and heroism, and of hope that these battles will never happen again.

The research enabling me to bring these stories alive comes from a number of groups who generously gave me access to their sites. The President of the 398th BG, the Curator of Parham Museum, granted kind permission for me to write about men of the 95th BG and the 390th BG: 'The men who never went home' (part one).

A very special dedication goes to one man who made the original edition (*CoTs*) possible: Mr Gary Moncur, the son of a pilot who flew in the 303rd BG at Molesworth. Mr Moncur allowed me to use his site for reference purposes and from my initial request for a photo, our friendship grew, the rest is history.

Thank you, Gary. Thank you for everything. I hope in my heart this version of *Chariots of Thunder* makes amends for the original with many unbeknown at the time (mistakes) and that people the world over visit your website to gain more knowledge: www.303rdbg.com and the men who flew from, worked and policed.

We must never forget what countless young men and women went through in WWII, civilians too. *Chariots Of Thunder* will be in two parts, enabling us, to tell more tales of what these veterans endured eighty years ago in their quest to bring us peace.

Special Limited Edition

Courtesy of Rafbf.org Pilot Flt Lt William Walker

The poem is inscribed on the Memorial Wall
at Capel-Le-Ferne.

Here inscribed the names of friends we knew,

Young men with whom we often flew.

Scrambled to many angels high,

They knew that they or friends might
die.

Many were very scarcely trained,

And many badly burnt or maimed.

Behind each name a story lies

Of bravery in summer skies;

Though many brave unwritten tales

Were simply told in vapour trails.

Many now lie in sacred graves

And many rest beneath the waves.

Outnumbered every day they flew,

Remembered here as just 'The Few'.

No....

Message

Chariots of Thunder

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VANISHED: WHAT HAPPENED TO RCAF NAVIGATOR 'VERN'? A WARTIME MYSTERY.

Researched from original archive military and Scotland Yard documents by Paul Allonby.

1.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE MEMORIAL at Runnymede in Surrey commemorates 20,275 RAF, Commonwealth and Allied air force personnel from World War Two, who have no known grave.



Along with the US memorial at Cambridge, it is a dignified homage to those who volunteered to serve the Allied cause, and who made the ultimate sacrifice.

Of the 20,275 men - and women - memorialised, 3,050 were members of the Royal Canadian Air Force. Of the 3,050 all but one was lost on operations.

The remaining missing man was 22-year-old Flight Sergeant Vernon 'Vern' Spearn, a navigator with Bomber Command, who went on leave to London in 1944 and vanished, never to be seen again.



'Vern' was from the Ontario city of Barrie, a strapping young man, just shy of six-foot-tall, a burly championship-level sportsman who excelled at rugby, basketball, hockey, swimming, ski-in and badminton.

A graduate of Barrie Collegiate Institute, he worked first as a professional photographer before securing a post with responsibility with the Canadian Railway, working as a bridge tender.



His father, Walter, who returned home from France in World War One with a grievous head injury which had cost him an eye, also worked on the railways. His American-born mum Beatrice, and younger brother David, completed the well-respected family.

Vernon volunteered to join the RCAF

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and swore his oath of allegiance in January 1942. He then trained in Canada and was selected to become a navigator, honing his trade skills at RCAF Trenton, Ontario, with No 4 Air Observer School.

In company with many others, he then made the journey across the Atlantic on a troopship in May 1943 where his training continued and he joined the crew of Pilot Officer Geoff Burwood, a 20-year-old from Bromley in Kent.

The newly-amalgamated team comprised of Flt Sgt Alec Friesner, a married 24-year-old, from Blackpool, Lancashire, who was their flight engineer; bomb-aimer Sgt John Montgomery, 21, from South Yarra, Sydney, Australia; wireless-operator Sgt Vic Bennett, 20, from Deeping St James, Lincolnshire, and air-gunners Sgt Bob Morris, 19, from Ashington, Northumberland, and Sgt Francis 'Frank' Smith, 20, from Hockley, Essex.

Vernon soon jelled and was regarded as a good navigator and a reliable team-player. He had previously served as a Lieutenant with the Army Cadets in Barrie and had flourished in his air force role since coming to the UK.



The final stages in the training schedule were an attachment to 19 Operational Training Unit at Kinloss in Scotland on Whitley twin-engine bombers, and then type-familiarisation on the four-engine Halifax at RAF Marston Moor before moving onto an operational squadron with the RCAF in Yorkshire.



With the crew's time in Scotland over, Vernon packed four kit bags and an imitation brown leather suitcase with his flying gear, his civilian clothes, RCAF uniform and personal belongings. He then left his accommodation at RAF Balnakeith, a

satellite base of Kinloss, at Forres, and set off to London for a well-earned period of leave.

The date was February 18th, 1944 and travelling with him on the train was 'Frank' Smith.

Geoff Burwood should have been with them, as Vernon was due to stay with his pilot's family, but he was retained at Kinloss for a promotion interview board.

The crew were to report at Marston Moor, near York, by 4 pm on February 29th. Accommodation had been arranged for them at nearby RAF Rufforth and after training, they were expected to fill the first crew vacancy that came up with RCAF at either Driffield or Leconfield, both in East Yorkshire.

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On the train journey south, he wrote a letter to his family back home, expressing satisfaction on how his training was going, and looking forward to putting it into use on missions over Germany and Occupied Europe.

When they arrived at King's Cross, 'Vern' and 'Frank' parted ways. Vernon stowed his kit bags in the left-luggage department at King's Cross and then apparently visited friends in the Russell Square area of Bloomsbury.



The next day (February 19th) he registered at the YMCA Canadian Forces 'Beaver' Club Hotel in Lexham Gardens, Kensington, where he was allocated one of the four beds in Room 30. He told the staff he planned to stay "two or three days" then head to Leeds in West Yorkshire to visit a married couple he knew and who he'd stayed with previously.

He then met Flying Officer Edgar Black, a wireless-operator/air-gunner instructor at 22 OTU, RAF Wellesbourne Mountford, Warwickshire, who was from Barrie. They swapped hometown news and Vernon got an insight into bomber operations as F/O Black had in November (1943) completed an operational tour.

On his first night in the capital, the German Luftwaffe had despatched some 180 bombers to attack London as part of a Blitz campaign called 'Operation Steinbock'.



The raids, which started in January and continued into May, saw a major strike on London that night - February 18th/19th - which started 480 fires, leaving 179 civilians dead, 484 seriously injured and 65 missing. Four RAF bases and a USAAF airfield were also bombed, with the Luftwaffe causing serious damage in central London. Some nine German bombers were shot down.

But the raid did not deter 'Vern' who met with another friend from home - a neighbour, Leading Aircraftsman Howard Kelly, attached to RCAF UK HQ in London and a member of the RCAF Band.

The pals arranged to meet for breakfast on February 21st before 'Vern' headed northwards to Leeds. LAC Kelly was later to describe his mate's demeanour as 'normal'.

Vernon told the staff at the hotel as he left for a night out on the 19th that he was heading to Hammersmith to go dancing.



They next saw him at 10 am on the 20th when he was seen leaving the club. The manageress, Miss Wharton, said he was wearing a dark green pinstripe suit and a silver identity wrist bracelet. She also noticed he was wearing his BCI (Barrie Collegiate Institute) graduation ring, and a gold ring with a pearl in-lay.

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He was in a good mood but did not say where he was going, or if he was meeting anyone. That was the last time anyone reported seeing him.



That night, London was pounded again by the Luftwaffe, with serious damage caused in the heart of the capital, in Kensington and Portobello. Around 165 bombers were tracked crossing the Essex coast at 15,000-feet which then commenced carpet bombing.



Some 600 major fires were started, with Fulham, Putney and Chiswick being targeted. Air raid records showed 20,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on Fulham, with 82 fires tackled by the fire service and 560 fires extinguished by citizens, police, military personnel, and Civil Defence wardens.

The death toll amidst Fulham's residential suburbs stood at 76, with 194 people badly hurt. Some 2,500 houses there were damaged or destroyed.



Other bombs caused havoc in Whitehall with damage to 10 Downing Street, Parliament, the Admiralty, and the War Office. Phosphorus bombs were dropped, and a firestorm narrowly averted. Nine German bombers were downed.

The next morning - February 21st - revealed what was finally to be tallied as a death toll of 216, with 417 people receiving hospital treatment for serious injuries. The fatalities included adults and children, firefighters, and Civil Defence staff.

At the rendezvous point, LAC Kelly waited in vain for his home-town friend. He never turned up at Morden where he had an open invitation to stay with the parents of P/O Burwood, and his friends at Roundhay - a middle-aged married couple with two children - were not to receive the visit they were anticipating.

On February 22nd, 'Verne' was reported missing by the YMCA hotel manager, Miss Wharton, to the RCAF HQ.

However, it was not until February 29th that Vernon was formally recorded missing when he failed to attend at RAF Marston Moor as instructed.

Enquiries were made at the YMCA and with his friends in Leeds, as per the leave card he'd submitted. Room 30 at the YMCA was searched, and his belongings were noted as

being in the same position as he'd left them, with "an array that suggested returning was anticipated" one report stated.

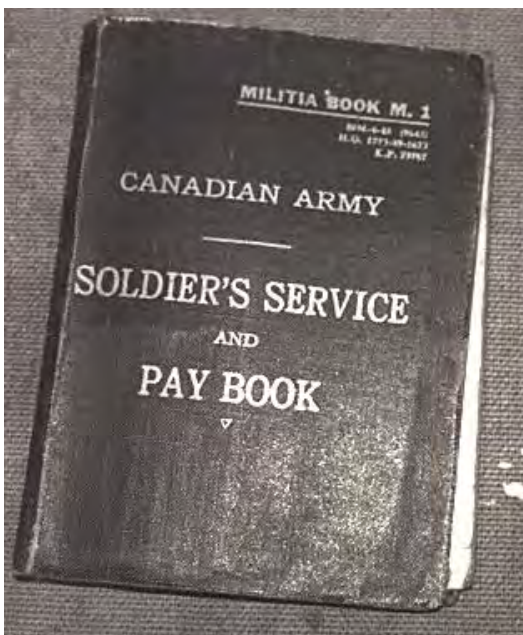
His photo was shown to the three other airmen also lodged in the room, but none had seen him or had any contact with him.

An inventory of his belongings was made. Comprising primarily of clothing and personal items, it also included a photo of a girl, identity unknown. Attempts to trace her were to prove fruitless.

Found in his suitcase were four rolls of exposed film, but no camera. No reference is made to the films being exposed to check if the images contained anything of evidential value. Also, no comment was passed about the absence of his civilian overcoat or hat.

The night of February 20th had been bitterly cold, with a heavy frost, yet the manager had not seen him wearing, or carrying, such apparel.

No comment was also made by the two officers who searched his belongings and that the right lens of his glasses was found to be smashed, nor about his pipe being broken in two.



His pay book and his RCAF identity tags were also missing. Inquiries showed the last withdrawal from his bank account had been three months earlier.

A month later - on March 29th, 1944 - Vernon was officially recorded as a deserter: 'Absent Without Leave'. His photo and description as a wanted man were circulated on May 1st, 1944, including appearing in the 'Police Gazette' with instructions for him to be arrested on sight and turned over to the RCAF for punishment.

However, for reasons unknown, his family had not been told any of this. They had continued writing to him, and then telegraphed him, asking how he was - but to no avail. They hadn't heard from him since his letter written on the train. And no-one had taken any action over their communications.

Then, on May 9th, a bombshell arrived for them in the post, a note from a Group Captain at RCAF HQ in Ottawa saying Vernon's pay had been stopped. No explanation, according to the family. They immediately sent a telegram to the RCAF in Ottawa demanding to know what was happening. Where was Vernon? Was he OK?

They received a response that he was being sought in the UK as a deserter - news that left them, and those who'd known him all his life, deeply shocked and puzzled. They could not believe it, and immediately suspected he had come to some harm, particularly as the Steinbock air raids had made headlines back in Canada, alongside the on-going RAF and USAAF bombing campaigns against German cities.

6.

However, back in England, the case was to take a strange turn.

On May 27th, a Forces Post Redirection Card in Vernon's name was received at the Canadian Military Postal HQ in London, requesting any mail for him be directed to RAF Rufforth. The name of the sender of the card was left blank.

Then, on June 22nd, a second redirection card was received, this time to East Moor, an RCAF station also in Yorkshire which neither Vernon - nor his crew - had any connection with.

The RCAF Military Police Investigation Branch was told of this development and found that there were 22 parcels, five letters and a telegram in his name at the East Moor base Post Office. Two letters were opened via random selection, but the contents revealed nothing of evidential value.

Instructions were left with the Post Staff and the RCAF Police patrolmen at the airfield to detain anyone enquiring if there was any mail for Vernon, or anybody coming to collect it. But no-one ever did, and this odd aspect of the case was eventually closed two months later.

Meanwhile, Scotland Yard had become involved, in the form of Detective Inspector New, and his colleague, PC Harper. They had been tasked with carrying out enquiries into Vernon's disappearance, with particular reference as to whether he had been a victim of the February 20th enemy air raid.



The majority of the bodies from that devastating night attack had quickly been identified, but the police were left with a skull, a pair of legs, and an arm which remained unidentified.

These remains had been recovered at two different locations. The arm still had a hand attached, which bore a signet ring with the initials 'FW' and which had been made in England. A missing person report made to West End Central Police led to a successful conclusion as to

who 'FW' had been and then later the other remains, found at Shepherd's Bush, were also identified.

A review was also carried out of every unidentified body found elsewhere in the UK, and photographs of persons in hospital suffering from amnesia also checked to no avail.



The detectives also reviewed crime reports, checked at licensed premises and places of entertainment, and sifted through the stored remnants of clothing recovered from bombed buildings, again without

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success. If Vernon had perished in the raid, no evidence could be found.

On the night of June 2nd, the crew of P/O Burford - with replacement navigator Sgt John Eastman, 22, from Torquay in Devon - took off for their first mission. Attached to 640 Squadron at RAF Leconfield, their Halifax was shot down over France by a Luftwaffe night fighter. There were no survivors.

Meanwhile, efforts were still being made to apprehend Vernon. RCAF investigators interviewed aircrew and other personnel at no fewer than 10 air bases, all people who knew or who had worked with him and who had in many cases been posted post-training to different units at a variety of UK locations.

The problem was, nobody was telling his family what was happening - despite their letters to the RCAF in London, Marston Moor, and Ottawa. The fact he was labelled a 'deserter' was, they said, besmirching his character, repeatedly recorded as 'very good' in RCAF and RAF appraisals, and they felt a change of status to 'missing' was more appropriate.

"It is as if Vernon has become nothing but a number to the Air Force," said Mrs Spearn, in one of the 30 letters to the RCAF, Canadian politicians, the Salvation Army and the Red Cross, that are enclosed in his 130-page file in the Canadian Archives.

The investigation then ground to a standstill except for a periodic review.

The war finished, airmen returned home, but nothing fresh came to light that could answer the question: what happened to Flt Sgt Vernon Arnold Spearn?



However, in 1946 a high-level case review was ordered by Air Marshal George Johnson, head of the RCAF in London. It was carried out by Wing-Commanders Beamer Hopkins - in civil life a very senior barrister - and S.I. Blaiklock, a highly respected RAF and RCAF Intelligence Officer, and no stone was left unturned.

Evidence was taken from more than 20 witnesses, and exhibits were produced and scrutinised.

The hearing was held at the RCAF Overseas HQ in Lincoln's Inn Fields, at the heart of London's legal community.

And it came to the view that Vernon should be recorded as 'Missing, Presumed Killed' with the status backdated to February 20th, 1944, coupled with a finding that he died, on the balance of probabilities, in the air raid on London that night.

The finding finally lifted the stigma that Vernon had absconded from the Air Force and had thus, for reasons unfathomed, deliberately left his loved ones in an agonising limbo.

His family were then sent the medals he was entitled to, and his name was later recorded at Runnymede on the Memorial of the Missing when it was constructed in 1951.

(He is also honoured at the RCAF Wall of the Missing in Canada, and on the war memorial in Barrie, where last year a flag, bearing his photo, was flown - along with 32 other local victims of foreign wars similarly honoured - in special 75th Armistice Day tribute.)

And while he has no known grave, the 1946 review outcome meant his family could finally grieve, with justice to his name done.

* WITH GRATITUDE TO The RCAF and Canadian National Archives; the UK National Archives, the Metropolitan Police, the YMCA, the City of Westminster Archives, the City
*
* of Barrie Council, the Canadian Legion, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. COPYRIGHT OCTOBER 2020.



#Remember Vernon on November the 11th. (Armistice Day) Researched from original archive military and Scotland Yard documents by Paul Allonby.

S/N R153630. 22-year-old Flight Sergeant Vernon 'Vern' Spearn, Grave Ref panel in ROYAL AIR FORCE MEMORIAL at Runnymede in Surrey commemorates 20,275 RAF, Commonwealth and Allied air force personnel

from World War Two..is on Panel 255.



THE END

The Devil Rides Out.

1.

At the peak of its strength in World War II, the United States Army Air Forces (AAF) had more than 2,400,000 men and women in uniform. America's air power in the overseas theatres of operations, at its height, comprising of 243 combat groups of the AAF which were divided as follows: 25 very heavy, 72 heavy, 20 medium, and 8 light bombardment groups; 71 fighter groups; and support units.

One such unit is the focus of this feature. Constituted as 455th Bombardment Group (Heavy) on 14 May 1943. Activated just a fortnight later on 1 June 1943. Trained with B-24's. Moved to Italy, arriving in Jan and Feb 1944. Served in combat with Fifteenth AF from Feb 1944 to Apr 1945, finally returning home in September 1945.



During their time there the group flew 282 missions and lost 118 Liberators in action - a total of 147 men killed, 268 missing, 179 prisoners, and 169 wounded in action. By contrast, the Group's gunners were credited with 119 enemy aircraft destroyed, and 78 damaged.

Engaged primarily in bombardment of strategic targets such as factories, marshalling yards, oil refineries, storage areas, harbours, and aerodromes in Italy, France, Germany, Poland,

Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, and the Balkans. It received a Distinguished Unit Citation for a mission on 2 Apr 1944 when the group contributed to Fifteenth AF's campaign against enemy industry by attacking a ball-bearing plant at Steyr and a second DUC in June 1944.

Now we turn to a major mission that tasked the USAAF to the limits.

The Kassel Mission on 27 September 1944 was also known as the air battle over the Seulingswald. The mission aimed to destroy the factories in Kassel of the engineering works of Henschel & Sohn which built tracked armoured vehicles (the "Tiger" and "Panther" tanks) and their associated infrastructure plus the Henschel & Sohn facilities, the makers of the Tiger I and King Tiger heavy tanks.

The Henschel & Sohn firm's locomotive plant, motor transport plant, railway works, Military HQs at Wehrkreis IX. The Bereich Hauptsitz Kassel Central Germany HQ, and highway & railway construction with the Regional Supreme Court.

For this mission the 8th Air Force, based in the UK, was the primary attacking force.

2.

Established on 22 February 1944 by the redesignation of VIII Bomber Command at RAF Daws Hill in High Wycombe, England, the Eighth Army Air Force (8 AAF) was a United States Army Air Forces combat air force in the European Theatre of World War II (1939 –1945), engaging in operations primarily in the Northern Europe area of responsibility; carrying out strategic bombing of enemy targets in France, the Low Countries, and Germany and engaging in air-to-air fighter combat against enemy aircraft until the German capitulation in May 1945.

For this mission it dispatched 283 B-24 Liberator bombers. The B-24 was used extensively in World War II. It served in every branch of the American armed forces as well as several Allied air forces and navies. It saw use in every theatre of operations. Along with the B-17, the B-24 was the mainstay of the US strategic

bombing campaign in the Western European theatre of the 2nd Combat Bombardment Wing.



Supporting these heavy bombers were, escorts, 198 P-51 Mustang fighters. From late 1943, P-51Bs and P-51Cs (supplemented by P-51Ds from mid-1944) were used by the USAAF's Eighth Air Force to escort bombers in raids over Germany.



The group designated for this raid was the 445th Bombardment Group, a Consolidated B-24 Liberator unit stationed in England with VIII Bomber Command.

The 445th was stationed at RAF Tibenham in late 1943. Royal Air Force Tibenham or more simply RAF Tibenham is a former Royal Air Force station located 13.5 miles southwest of Norwich and 5.8 miles north of Diss, Norfolk, England.



However, it was designated for use by the USAAF. The airfield was built up during 1941/42 as a standard heavy bomber airfield with a main runway 6,000 ft long and two secondary runways 4,200 feet in length. It had an enclosed perimeter track containing 36 frying-pan type hardstands

and fourteen loops. Two T-2 hangars were constructed on the eastern side of the airfield and adjacent to the technical site. Accommodations were constructed for about 2,900 personnel.

3.

Tibenham was assigned USAAF designation Station 124, Tibenham became home to the 445th Bombardment Group (Heavy) of the United States Army Air Forces Eighth Air Force. The 445th arrived from Sioux City Army Air Base, Iowa on 4 November 1943. The 445th was assigned to the 2nd Combat Bombardment Wing, and the group tail code was a "Circle-F". Its operational squadrons were numbered 700-703 inclusive.

The morning of September 27, 1944 started like so many others for the group, with the crews awakened in darkness to prepare for the day's sortie. On this occasion, however, the wake-up call came earlier, and the men were still half asleep and tired and yawning and wondering 'why so early.' Early breakfast was hard to eat, then in the briefing room still tired and burping, they listened intently. The briefed route contained a series of control points which would guide the formation to the target. The crews listening still tired were relieved when informed that the German capital, which bristled with anti-aircraft batteries, would not be their target. Instead, their bombs would fall on vehicle plants in Kassel. They were happy to hear that the schedule would have them back at their base early. Now they had to get their equipment and get to the B-24 sitting on the tarmac waiting for them



These chariots taxi to the main runway, now all engines in power they sit and wait patiently, then the flare hits the drab morning skies and the B-24 the big war workhorse now heavily laden moves forward, from the control towers

balcony men are seen watching these beasts hurl down the runway, one every 30 seconds. The 445th was to lead the 2nd Combat Bomb Wing that day with the 389th Bomb Group on the left and the 453rd Bomb Group on the right.

The pilots who were watching the banks of dials, toggles, which controlled the rudders and equally looking ahead knew when thundering down the runway vibrating, a slight twitch would make the tyres burst and the fully-laden bomber would career of the runway, a wing hitting the ground and the aircraft would burst into flames, a terrifying situation for all on board. So wheel after wheel the monstrous machines gather pace, propellers turning from the 4 Pratt and Whitney 1,200 hp cylinder radial engines, and then at the precise moment both he and the co-pilot pull the control wheels back to their limit, every foot of greased cable winding through the pulleys and stretching back to the big elevators this mighty workhorse lifts, and from the control tower faces taut, watch the thirty second delay, as the 35 planes lift, The sense of power must have been overwhelming for the pilots and crew within.

4.

A crescendo of noise and young men of the mighty USAAF take off in 30 seconds wave.

Within the aircraft the crew get ready to steady their positions.



Everyone within wears a boiler suited suit over woollen sub-train against what would be like their B-17 counterparts to keep out the cold as the planes had no heating, fleece lined helmets, down to pants. They wear sheepskin boots, gloves, take these off just to scratch ones nose and hands would instantly freeze. One prays the oxygen flows through ones masks from the long hoses in the ship's system, for without this its death At 20,000 ft hypoxia is a horrible thing. In the case of altitude sickness, where hypoxia develops gradually, the symptoms include fatigue, numbness / tingling of extremities, nausea, and cerebral anoxia. These symptoms are often difficult to identify, but early detection of symptoms can be critical and low blood pressure followed by heart failure eventually leading to shock and death.



The sky today would be black with man and machine, and with their fighter escort. Inside these workhorses there is a 12" catwalk and is the only way the crewmen at the back could get to the front if wanted, not a walk for the faint-hearted if the bomb doors were open.



Below the pilots seating was a duct -like tunnel to the nose and this position was for the bombardiers with his Norden bombsight

The liberator was more difficult to fly in formation but Flying at high altitudes this machine had a maximum range of nearly 1600 miles. Now the planes headed for their final assembly point where they would form up into the massive formation heading for Germany. Once the main bomber stream was assembled, they departed the English coastline and headed into Europe.

5.

The runway at Tibenham now quiet, the control tower personnel turn and go back and link up by radio, one man looks at the last bomber and salutes, wondering will they be safe, will they return.

They proceeded to the target, however through a terrible gross miscalculation of the lead plane, the navigator must have somehow misjudged flight from departure to destination a celestial error perhaps, or was it a joint affair the radar man talking as he is supposed to know it all and render position reports every 30 minutes, but something happened and it caused the 455th to leave the main bomber stream, and worse lost their fighter escort, and headed north of Kassel to bomb Gottingen 25 miles NE , but here they encountered 150 Luftwaffe planes, resulting in the most concentrated and chilling air battle in history.



The Luftwaffe unit was a Stormgruppen, a special unit intended to attack bombers by flying in tight formations, up to ten fighters in line abreast. This tactic was intended to break the bomber formation at a single pass. This day the 445th Bomb Group suffered the highest day loss of any 8th AF group during the war. Hacked to pieces by wave after wave of Fw 190 fighters from JG 3, JG 300, and JG 4, all equipped with the heavy armoured, cannon-equipped interceptors.



Some men would die painfully, some will get burned, some will get vaporized, when in combat you were either religious or superstitious, one had to have something to cling too, for in these B-24s what were they

feeling that day.

Liberators had only one exit near the tail, Trying to escape a stricken bomber aircraft is not easy. The aircraft may not be under control and will be gyrating and spinning

and even upside down. Or on fire and there might very well be wounded or dyeing aircrew. It is almost impossible for the crew to reach the rear from the flight deck when wearing a parachute. Today this wouldn't be on these young minds.



The three Sturmgruppen had managed to approach the 445th unmolested and drove

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through the B-24 formation. In just a few short minutes the Kassel mission was escalating into a full-scale massacre.

One crew man to survive remembers the awful air battle and the fact the weather conditions played a significant role

in the events of this day, but the only explanation was that the radar man had made a grievous error. Practically every navigator in our group picked up on this mistake almost instantly, " This put the entire group out of the bomber stream, and they were on their own, it was too late for the lead ship to correct to the right, as he would have run into the stream of bombers coming up from the rear," one report stated.

In hindsight we can say that the correct thing to do would have been to make a 360 turn to the left and come in on the rear of the second division, but he decided to continue on east and bomb the city of Gottin-gen, about 50 miles away. As a result, we lost our fighter escort, and flew alone to our own destruction. Flying on alone that morning, the 445th paid a hefty price for its poor navigation and the missing .50-caliber machine guns that used to adorn the planes' vulnerable bellies.

Some of the pilots contacted the lead ship to report the error, but the only signal they received was "Keep it tight-Keep it together".

Ten minutes later, about one hundred German fighters jumped the group of bombers. They attacked us line abreast in three waves. Most of these fighters were specially adapted FW-190s equipped with extra armour, and both 20 and 30mm cannons.

The ferocity in which the Fw 190s attacked is evident, bullets flying everywhere, gunners shouting over the intercoms 'coming up from 7 o'clock they are queuing up for an attack, ' watch it 11'oclock a swarm, the nose gunners firing at the fighters knowing that if they penetrated these monsters they would all die, it was a horrendous attack, as the FW-190 assault fighters passed through the bomber formations with 20 and 30mm cannons blazing, and the 50 cal. machine guns of the B-24s responding.



The skies were full of bright flashes from the exploding shells. Fw-190s approached the group from behind, three abreast diving down as they fired. Then followed two Me-109 Gruppen of JG.4 who picked off the damaged aircraft. With individuals falling away, the formation was spread and broken up. It was pure decimation, it was simply a grotesque embrace of death for many,

These men in the B-24s destined to bring terror to Kassel, were being murderously gunned down, today fate was in their hands, but the German fighters were sustaining relentless pressure.

The German pilots were vicious attacking at all angles but the B-24s fought bravely back, if one could the air smelled of death.

This intensity of air battle tested man against man, machine against machine but the faster single seat fighters were quicker than that the heavy B-24s, their defensive firepower penetrated these sole B-24s, it seemed to the German aces this was a turkey shoot, as they came in fast from behind shocking the crews who masterly tried to defend themselves, but they seemed slow to act, but soon they although vulnerable started firing all the guns.

Cordite fumes inside the planes, red hot lead pinging hopefully a fighter, their bullets hitting the lone cockpits of these bees, and not their lead hitting their fuselages.

The vibration going through these workhorses was tremendous. The terrified B-24 pilots were separating further apart and preying they wouldn't be the next plane to go down.



Waist gunners endeavouring to put lead into the 109s, but one plane had the tail turret catch fire, from direct hits by 20 mm cannon in the first wave of FW-190s, and both waist gunners were wounded and bloody along with the tail gunner. It was absolute nightmare situation.

Frightened young men were getting tired, but they had to stay awake, as each fighter came and fired a volley 20mm and 30 mm cannon shells being fired at you trying to maim or kill or bring the B-24 down. One turret got a direct hit from one of these planes, and it blew the Plexiglas out, panic set in, followed by sheer terror.

The intensity, the carnage, the horror to see two B-24s ahead blow up and plummet to earth and another explode splitting into three parts, crewmen jumping among the smoke one couldn't spot any other chutes.

Then shocked by the sight of an Fw-190 striking the plane on his right wing with 20 to 30 small bombs. Only a waist gunner was able to bail out, the rest perishing.

Another pilot witnessed several large streams of gasoline pouring into the bomb bay. He was well aware of the necessity of getting that highly combustible fuel out of the

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plane, the co-pilot did what he could to open the bomb bay doors but in the process was drenched in gas.

Not long afterward a 20mm shell exploded under his feet, wounding him in the right foot and both legs and upending him onto the 12 " catwalk with bomb doors open. It is horrendous just how quickly a flying metal constructed aircraft can truly become a fireball of flames. If escape did not get effected quickly, it did not succeed at all, and the prospect of being burned to death while alive was a fate faced all too often by both German as well as American aircrews.

A blinding flash followed, and soon he found himself on fire from head to toe. After losing consciousness, he awoke while descending in his parachute. Death now seemed inevitable. The burning B-24 exploded shortly thereafter.

Previously the Co-Pilot later ran into the B-24's only other survivor, tail gunner now in a German hospital. He recounted how he had been blown out of his turret and saw one of the plane's wings hurtle past him just before he lost consciousness. The gunner came to just in time to pull the ripcord on his parachute. These young men witnessed sheer horror. The Luftwaffe fighters had taken out most of the squadron on the first pass.

First Lieutenant Bertram, the 702nd's lead navigator who had initially noticed the 445th's course divergence, reported that his plane had been badly hit in the German attack. Because of the shells sent through the fuselage and the direct hits, and explosions and fires in several vital areas, Bertram said it was a mystery that the plane didn't blow up. The co-pilot and radio operator were killed, but the rest of the crew managed to bail. With all the chutes in the sky, the scene resembled a paratrooper invasion. The Lieutenant landed in a tree and was discovered the next afternoon by a group of Hitler Youth, who turned him over to the Bad Hersfeld City Police, and 25 bombers were shot down across an area 15 miles across and went down over the Seulingswald. Total losses were avoided by the late arrival of the 361st Fighter Group.

One was killed in the plane which crashed in Norfolk and one was killed in the crash in Belgium, for a total of 117 airmen lost their lives and 121 men were taken prisoner; During the battle the German Air Force lost 29 planes, with 18 German pilots KIA. The battle, which had seemed to take an eternity, hardly lasted five minutes, with eight of the 703rd's 10 bombers that took off that morning not making it through the maelstrom.

And it is true that five American airmen were murdered that day near the village of Nentershausen. Of the remaining four that made it back to Tibenham one shocked crewman said in tears "we lost so many, so many, and look at our plane it's a mess full of holes and big chunks off. Others listened intently to their horrifying stories.



It was hard, however, to keep news of the disaster from spreading around the base. The mess hall had prepared food for several hundred, and when only about two dozen showed up for the post-mission meal, it didn't take long for the cooks to surmise what had happened.

700th B24J # 42-50784 (Hardstand 7) Crash-landed at Metz-Frescaty Airfield, France.

1stLt	French	John E	Pilot	Returned to Duty
1stLt	Cochran	Robert	D Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty
F/O	Tims	Robert T	Navigator	Returned to Duty
T/Sgt	Fiske	Fred N	Radio Operator...call letter D+ (Dog)	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Greenly	David A	Nose Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Huddleston	Charles A	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Corman	James E	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
T/Sgt	Jacobs	William L	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Schwartz	Herbert R	Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.

700th B24H # 42-95078 (Runway 27) Crashed 2 Km Southwest of Richelsdorf, Germany. MACR 9396

2ndLt	Hansen	Robert N	Pilot	KIA
2ndLt	Bridges	Herbert C Jr	Co-Pilot	Stalag Luft I
2ndLt	Pile	Porter M	Navigator	KIA
2ndLt	Woodley	John C	Bombardier	Stalag Luft I
T/Sgt	Triplett	James M		
			Radio Operator...call letter C+ (Charley)	
			KIA	
S/Sgt	Howell	S E Jr	Waist Gunner	KIA
S/Sgt	Hornsby	Elwyn J	Waist Gunner	Stalag 9C
T/Sgt	Palmer	Charles C Jr	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	KIA
S/Sgt	Bode	Ralph H	Tail Gunner	KIA.

700th B24J # 42-51547 (Hardstand 48) Returned to Tibenham.

Capt.	Graham	James M	Deputy Group Commander	Returned to Duty
Capt.	Uebelhoer	Wilbur L "Web"	L Pilot	Returned to Duty
1stLt	Hart	Billy B	Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty
1stLt	Whitefield	Donald D	Navigator (Dead Reckoning)	Returned to Duty.

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2ndLt Fluer JamesP			Navigator (Radar)	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Scheu Mervin		V	Navigator (Pilotage)	Returned to Duty	
1stLt Kugel Arthur NMN			Bombardier	Returned to Duty	
T/Sgt Sims Robert		L	Radio Operator...call letter E+ (Easy)	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt CabralSantos		B	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Mesrobian Haig NMN			Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Shinske John C			Spare Gunner	Returned to Duty	
T/Sgt Skomro Joseph		J	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Hubicz John S			Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.	

700th B24J # 42-110022 (Runway 27) "Patches" Crashed at Iba, Germany.

MACR 9399

1stLt Carrow Raphael		E	Pilot	Stalag Luft I	
2ndLt Brainard Newell		W	Co-Pilot	KIA	
2nd Lt Austin George		R	Navigator/Bombardier	KIA	
T/Sgt Belouski Roy A			Radio Operator...call letter F+ (Fox)	KIA	
S/Sgt Panconi Victor J			Nose Turret Gunner	KIA	
S/Sgt Loether Charles		W	Waist Gunner	Stalag Luft IV	
S/Sgt Dengler Nicholas		H	Waist Gunner	POW	
T/Sgt TocketLouis T			Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	KIA	
S/Sgt Ledin Herbert		A	Tail Gunner	Stalag Luft IV.	

700th B24H # 42-94810 (Runway 27) "Terrible Terry's Terror" Crash-landed 12 Km East of Lille, France.

1stLt Hunter William		F	Pilot	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Ferryman Lee D			Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Keams Robert		H	Navigator	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Smith George E			Bombardier	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Spera Thomas G			Photographer/Observer	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Ratchford Robert		H	Engineer	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Monzingo Jake S			Radio Operator...call letter J+ (Jig)	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Cannon Robert		J	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
Sgt Selser Joseph A			Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
Sgt Sarber Robert		W	Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty	
S/Sgt Schaffer Fred C			Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.	

700th B24J # 44-10497 (Hardstand 2A) Crashed at Lauchroden, Germany.

MACR 9384

1stLt Pearson Ralph H			Pilot	Stalag Luft I	
2ndLt DimickNelson		L	Co-Pilot	Stalag Luft I	
2ndLt Stearns Arthur E			Navigator	KIA	
F/O Henrikson Henry J			Bombardier	KIA	
T/Sgt O'Keefe Doye L			Radio Operator...call letter P̄+ (Peter)	Stalag Luft IV	

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S/Sgt Tachovsky	Harry F	Waist Gunner	Stalag Luft IV	
S/Sgt LovingJohn	M	Waist Gunner	Stalag Luft IV	
T/Sgt Johnson	Robert	D	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	KIA
S/Sgt Galyon	Dwight	F	Tail Gunner	Stalag Luft IV.

700th B24H # 42-95128 (Hardstand 51) "Bonnie Vee" Crashed 1 Km West of Richelsdorf, Germany. MACR 9397

2ndLt Bruce	William	S	Pilot	Ob.Hosp, transfrd to Luft III 12-27-44
1stLt Willet	John P Jr	Co-Pilot	KIA	
2ndLt Abraham	Daniel A	Navigator	KIA	
2ndLt Appleton	Daniel H	Bombardier	KIA	
T/Sgt Pogovich	Peter			
Radio Operator...	call letter R+ (Roger)			
Stalag Luft IV				
S/Sgt Fleming	William	J	Waist Gunner	KIA
S/Sgt Paulus	Fred A	Waist Gunner	KIA	
T/Sgt Hess	Calvin F	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	KIA	
S/Sgt Shaffer	Glenn H	Tail Gunner	KIA.	

700th B24H # 42-95210 (Runway 27) Crash-landed at Brussels, Belgium.

1stLt Heitz	Raymond	V	Pilot	Returned to Duty
2ndLt Vedera	Harold T	Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Leary	John F	Navigator	Returned to Duty	
2ndLt Drake	Edward	J	Bombardier	Returned to Duty
T/Sgt Mack	Fabian	S		
Radio Operator...	call letter Ū+ (Uncle)			
Returned to Duty				
S/Sgt Ochevsky	Louis	NMN	Waist Gunner	KIA
S/Sgt Palm	Elroy W	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
T/Sgt Harrison	Homer	P	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt Watson	Maynard	B	Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.

701st B24J # 42-50855 (Hardstand 40) Landed at Manston Emergency Field Kent, England.

2ndLt Dewey	William	R	Pilot	Returned to Duty
2ndLt Boykin	William	L	Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty
2ndLt Bailey	Herbert	E	Navigator	Returned to Duty
Sgt Ellson	John E	Radio Operator...	call letter Ā+ (Able)	Returned to Duty
Sgt Medlock	Leslie I	Nose Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty	
Sgt Bartkow	Walter J	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty	
Sgt Johnson	George	R	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt Craig	Charles	O	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty
Sgt Montanez	Reuben	A	Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.

701st B24J # 42-50710 (Hardstand 36) "Maria Lupine" Returned to Tibenham.

1stLt Smith	Donald	H	Pilot	Returned to Duty
2ndLt Lerch	Adolph	F	Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty

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2ndLt	Carpenter	William	O	Navigator	Returned to Duty
1stLt	Smith	Clarence	H Jr	Bombardier	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Klinefelter	William	R	Radio Operator...call letter	Ē+ (Easy)
Returned to Duty					
1stLt	Capuano	Anthony	NMN	Nose Gunner	Returned to Duty
Sgt	Cowart	Curtis	V	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
Sgt	Laswell	Jack	NMN	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Davis	Lonnie	O	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty
Sgt	Gray	Eldon	E	Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.

701st B24H # 42-51105 (Hardstand 36) "Sweetest Rose of Texas" Returned to Tibenham.

1stLt	Swofford	Paul	NMN	Pilot	Returned to Duty
1stLt	Smith	Ward	A	Co-Pilot	Returned to Duty
F/O	Dobek	Henry	W	Navigator	Returned to Duty
T/Sgt	Thum	Eugene	F		
Radio Operator...call letter O+ (Oboe)					
Returned to Duty					
S/Sgt	Deshazer	Marvin	E	Nose Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Dykes	Willard	R	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Waller	Joseph	V	Waist Gunner	Returned to Duty
T/Sgt	Vosburgh	Phillip	Jr	Engineer/Top Turret Gunner	Returned to Duty
S/Sgt	Pimpinelli	Timothy	NMN	Tail Gunner	Returned to Duty.

701st B24H # 41-28922 (Hardstand 34) "Texas Rose" Crashed at Giesen am Schifftenberg, Germany. MACR 9386

2ndLt Bruland After six weeks of basic training, Palmer Bruland tested to become a cadet in the Army Air Force. His training would have included nine weeks of pre-flight school, nine weeks of Primary, another nine weeks of Basic flight school, then nine weeks of Advanced training on dual engine planes. Finally, he would be shipped to Transition training, where he flew four-engine bombers. After that, he would meet his crew for crew training.

Palmer	M	Pilot	Stalag Luft I	
2ndLt Belitsos	Peter	S	Co-Pilot	Stalag Luft IV
2ndLt Cuddy	Norman	J	Navigator	Stalag Luft IV

T/Sgt Boman James H
Radio Operator...call letter Q+ (Queen)
POW

Sgt Flach Ferdinand It was testified that Sgt Flach was held prisoner and shot. It has been said that the man who shot him had just lost his son in a bombing raid. The murderer had an accomplice, who committed suicide in prison while awaiting trial. Some believe that the one who stood trial and was summarily executed for the crime is the accomplice and that the one who committed suicide is the primary perpetrator.

E Nose Turret Gunner KIA

S/Sgt Huffman Leelt was testified that S/Sgt Huffman was held prisoner and shot. It has been said that the man who shot him had just lost his son in a bombing raid. The murderer had an accomplice, who committed suicide in prison while awaiting trial. Some believe that the one who stood trial and was summarily

executed for the crime is the accomplice and that the one who committed suicide is the primary perpetrator. R Waist Gunner KIA
 S/Sgt Sullivan Hugh J Waist Gunner POW
 S/Sgt Gray Stephen J Engineer/Top Turret Gunner Stalag Luft IV
 S/Sgt Dove Charles M Tail Gunner Stalag Luft IV.

Both these men were murdered and the reading of the war crimes on December 1946 it is without a doubt murder It is testified in the war crimes trial transcript below that S/Sgts. Flach and Huffman were held prisoner and taken outside one at a time and shot. It has been said that the man who shot them had just lost his son in a bombing raid. The murderer had an accomplice, who committed suicide in prison while awaiting trial. Some believe that the one who stood trial and was summarily executed for the crime is the accomplice and that the one who committed suicide is the primary perpetrator.

Palmer Bruland flew with this crew for the first time on September 27, 1944. After the war, he, and his co-pilot, 1Lt. Peter Belitsos, who had also had never flown with this crew, stayed in touch.

701st B24J # 42-50579 (Hardsdtand 34) "Little Audrey" Crashed 18 Km Southwest of Koblenz, Germany. MACR 9761

2ndLt Reynolds Donald N Pilot Stalag Luft I
 2ndLt Robinson Herbert T Co-Pilot Stalag Luft I
 1stLt Withey James T Navigator/Bombardier Stalag Luft I
 S/Sgt Sheehan Robert C
 Radio Operator...call letter R+ (Roger)
 Stalag Luft IV
 Sgt Long Robert M Nose Turret Gunner KIA
 Sgt Danner Maynard R Waist Gunner Stalag Luft IV
 Sgt Larsen Lars E Waist Gunner KIA
 S/Sgt Engleman James T Engineer/Top Turret Gunner Stalag Luft IV
 Sgt Twigg Harry G Tail Gunner Stalag Luft IV.

701st B24H # 42-94863 (Hardstand 40) "Ole Baldy" Crashed 2 Km South of Cornberg, Germany. MACR 9395

2ndLt Golden William F Pilot KIA
 2ndLt Christie Robert C Co-Pilot Stalag Luft I
 2ndLt Boomhower Edmund F Navigator Stalag Luft I
 2ndLt Boecher Theodore C Bombardier Stalag Luft III
 S/Sgt Erickson Jack M Radio Operator...call letter T+ (Tare) Stalag Luft IV
 Sgt Bagley Robert R Waist Gunner Stalag Luft IV
 Sgt Feltus Edward H Waist Gunner Stalag Luft IV
 T/Sgt Romine Earl C Engineer/Top Turret Gunner Stalag Luft IV (Earl passed away on October 13th, 1991 in Lee County, Florida.).
 Sgt Stewart Norman J Tail Gunner KIA.

701st B24J # 44-10490 (Hardstand 39) "Jane" Crashed at Lauchroden, Germany. MACR 9383

1stLt Walther Edgar N Pilot Stalag 9C