

O'LAUGHAN, WALTER E.

Tail Turret

S/Sgt.

The severely cold weather caused many cases of frost-bite on hands, feet and faces, and there were a few men wounded by flak. But S/Sgt. Earl M. Semons, from the 68th Squadron and a member of the Marcoullier crew, was killed when his oxygen mask froze so badly that he suffocated before he was observed to be in trouble. This was his fourth mission. Two others on this aircraft, S/Sgts. Thomas M. Tate and Walter E. O'Laughan, also suffered frozen hands and feet.

## 68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., Kessler

Returned to base

## 68th Squadron Crew (partial):

KESSLER, JOSEPH P.

Pilot

1st Lt.

ASN 0-733662

Suffered frostbite, returned to duty in U.S.

In addition, Lt. Joseph P. Kessler, a 68th Squadron pilot, suffered frozen hands and feet. He was sent to the 2nd General Hospital for further treatment on 18 December 43. He was then returned to duty in the United States.

## 1 December 1943

## Solingen, Germany

The main objective in this city was the aero-casting works, that had to be bombed by Pathfinder (PFF) method due to bad weather. Twenty aircraft were dispatched for this target, one did not return – the one piloted by 1st Lt. Edward F. Taylor from the 67th Squadron.

## 67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-7544 C-Bar, Taylor

MACR #1382

## 67th Squadron Crew:

TAYLOR, EDWARD F.

Pilot

1st Lt.

ASN 0-530758

Evadee, returned

Perry,  
Oklahoma

AKINS, JAMES C.

Co-pilot

2nd Lt.

ASN 0-677193

Evadee, POW

Haskell,  
Texas

FOARD, JACK D.

Navigator

2nd Lt.

ASN 0-678629

POW

Summerville,  
Missouri

DOLGIN, WILLIAM J.

Bombardier

2nd Lt.

ASN 0-676576

Evadee, POW

Los Angeles,  
California

WOJCIK, EDWARD S.

Engineer

S/Sgt.

ASN 39094162

POW

Portland,  
Oregon

KNOLL, ROBERT S.

Radio Oper

T/Sgt.

ASN 33358743

POW

Warnersville,  
Pennsylvania

DZWONKOWSKI, HENRY J.

Belly Gun.

S/Sgt.

ASN 35318190

Evadee, returned

Cleveland,  
Ohio

McCUE, MILES J.

RW Gunner

S/Sgt.

ASN 33303966

POW

Pittsburgh,  
Pennsylvania

BAYER, ARTHUR T. ASN 37377434	LW Gunner POW	S/Sgt.	St. Louis, Missouri
MORRIS, WILLIAM F. ASN 12138123	Tail Turret POW	S/Sgt.	Chadwick, New York

Sgt. Miles J. McCue, right waist gunner on this crew, relates this account, “We had dropped our bombs over Solingen and were on our way home on what had been a comparatively uneventful trip. But as we neared the coast of Belgium, Lt. Taylor and the engineer (Wojcik) began exchanging small talk about the gasoline supply. ‘Did you switch tanks?’ ‘No, I didn’t, but I will.’ Eventually I realized that we were just about out of gas. The navigator (Lt. Foard) was brought into the conversation and I remember the words, ‘twenty minutes.’ Now, as to whether this referred to the fuel supply or to the nearest landing field, I can’t recall.

“About this time, just as we started out over the North Sea, Lt. Taylor announced that we were going to have to bail out! He, then, turned the plane around and when we were over land, again announced, ‘Bail out – hit the silk!’ These are the last words I heard before I left the plane, and needless to say, they are etched indelibly in my mind.

“The first clue I got that something unusual had happened after I left the plane was during my second interrogation which took place about five days later at Dulag Luft, in Frankfurt. The interrogator asked how we were knocked down ‘Flak or fighters?’ When I showed no inclination to discuss it, he suggested that, ‘Maybe you ran out of gas?’ This indicated to me that the plane had not been found, and also that someone had tipped the enemy to the fact that we had a fuel problem.”

*Note: The aircraft came down in Isselmeer and may have been salvaged.*

Arthur Bayer, another crew member added, “We had to bail out over a little Belgian village – Veurne, I think. I was an extra that day – waist gunner. It was not my regular crew. I don’t know whether Taylor was ever heard from again.”

*Note: Lt. Taylor was an evadee.*

William Morris, tail turret gunner, states that, “Our ship apparently was hit by flak in the target area, problems developed, and later we were ordered to bail out. There were not many fighters in the target area, so our damage was thought to be flak. I thought that we all bailed out OK, as all in the rear of the ship did so. Miles McCue’s (chute) harness caught on the escape hatch but I managed to work him free with great difficulty and much strength. I was the last to leave from the rear area. I could see the Channel on the way down.

“Upon landing, I was free for about one hour after meeting up with Ed Wojcik, and we headed south through several dykes and canals where we got soaking wet. But a party of German soldiers came over a small rise and gave us the usual, ‘For you, the war is over’ bit. Went to jail overnight, then to Frankfurt Dulag Luft, arriving the day after a night bombing raid by the RAF, and the citizens were trying to lynch all of us. The soldiers kept the citizens away.”

The bombardier, William Dolgin, said, “I did not know the crew very well as I flew this mission as a fill-in for their regular bombardier. I was on Art Lowe’s crew, normally. Jim Akens, the co-pilot, Henry Dzwonkowski, and I were together (as evadees) most of the time we were in Belgium. Jim and I were caught by the Gestapo on 25 March 1944, while Henry made it back to the States. Henry was the one to inform my parents in August that I was alive. Prior to that, they

thought that I was KIA. Yes, it was flak that got us. It hit our wing. The lead bombardier goofed and got us too close to some flak batteries.” Bill’s extended account continues with detailed evasion data, capture, POW time and assisting in the capture of a man aiding the Germans.

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## 11 December 1943

### Emden, Germany

This target was vital to traffic, both a boat and rail center. Fierce enemy fighter attacks were made by forty to seventy ships despite the very fine fighter support that we had. One 67th Squadron plane did not return.

#### 67th SQUADRON:

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67th Sq., #41-23232 M-Bar, O’Neill

CALABAN

#### 67th Squadron Crew:

O’NEILL, RICHARD F. ASN 0-798225	Pilot POW/KIA, buried	1st Lt. Ardennes (A-25-15)	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
WORTH, WOODROW N. ASN 0-683521	Co-pilot POW/KIA	2nd Lt.	Winter Haven, Florida
GRIMES, GEORGE G. ASN 0-885961	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	Albia, Iowa
SHAW, CHARLES M. ASN 0-661667	Bombardier POW, KIA, buried	Capt. Ardennes (A-41-50)	Liberty, Mississippi
McADAMS, ROBERT C. ASN 14039719	Engineer POW	S/Sgt.	Ensley, Alabama
KENNON, DANIEL ASN 38102848	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Douglas, Arizona
ALLEN, NORBERT G. ASN 37430255	Hatch Gun. KIA	S/Sgt.	Des Moines, Iowa
HAGMANN, PAUL A. ASN 39393257	RW Gunner KIA, buried	Sgt. Ardennes (B-44-55)	Mt. Shasta, California
LESTER, JULIAN V. ASN 17047877	LW Gunner KIA	Sgt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
BOGGESS, BOYD Jr. ASN 33213653	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Richland, Virginia

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*Note: The 44th BG records show that O’Neill, his co-pilot Worth, and bombardier Shaw were officially reported as POW; then later changed to KIA. Nothing has been found to explain this.*

Again, the 67th Squadron lost an airplane and crew, but not through the efforts of the Germans. Lt. Richard F. O’Neill was the pilot of CALABAN (this ship was a veteran of Ploesti) who was noted for his violent evasive actions on bomb runs. It was this excessive action which contributed to his downfall. O’Neill was seen to swing over and behind aircraft #42-72878 and slightly to the right, just at ‘bombs away’. Lt. O’Neill’s bombardier dropped his bombs on the swing. But just then the bombs from a plane above them struck the right wing, breaking it off at #4 engine. Bombs also hit the tail assembly as well, knocking it completely off. The ship went into a spin, caught fire, but no chutes were observed. Lt. George W. Carvour saw the plane crash on land

near the Emden estuary – his interest being especially high as he had been the regular bombardier for the O'Neill crew! Though no chutes were seen, one man did survive.

Note: Mrs. McAdams said that her husband, who is now deceased, reported he may have seen at least one other parachute. Sgt. McAdams, a veteran of Ploesti, was interned in Turkey for a short period. He was the only man to survive from this crew.

There was one other casualty in the Group this day, that being a navigator, Louis V. Trouvé, who became a POW.

66th SQUADRON:

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66th Sq., #42-7476, Comey	NICE 'N NAUGHTY	Returned to base
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*This aircraft was also known as PRINCESS CHARLOTTE.*

66th Squadron Crewman:

COMEY, RICHARD J. ASN 0-789539	Pilot	Lt.	Stowe, Vermont
DRYSDALE, THOMAS T. ASN 0-739744	Co-pilot	Lt.	Arizona
TROUVÉ, LOUIS V. ASN 0-797427	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Hempstead, L.I., New York
KIPPLE, JAMES E. ASN 13044897	Bombardier	Lt.	
GREENBERG, ALBERT ASN 33323980	Radio Oper.	S/Sgt.	Pennsylvania
STOEFEN, M. J. ASN 37263571	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	Rapids, South Dakota
HALL, QUENTINE J. ASN 12137925	Belly Gunner	T/Sgt.	Newcomb, New York
ROSINSKI, STANLEY J. ASN 12050666	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Elizabeth New Jersey
NEITZEL, D. W. ASN 37424963	LW Gunner	Sgt.	Guernsey, Louisiana
WALKER, RICHARD H. ASN 37335675	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.	Newcomb, New York

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Richard Comey provided the following account, “We received a direct hit on the nose, right above the navigator, Louis Trouvé. The force of the explosion knocked him backwards, over on the nose wheel doors and out he went. Fortunately, though wounded, he opened his chute, landed in a bay, and was picked up by the Germans. (Lou and his wife, and Charlotte and I got together in New York after the war.)

“After Lou was gone, we found flames were licking out of the hole in the nose, so I pressed the alarm button, “prepare to abandon ship”. The ball gunner (Neitzel?) saw Lou go by his turret and decided things were really serious. He tried to get out of his ball, but some empty shells or perhaps a belt or two had jammed the back exit door. With brute strength – and he was not a very heavily-built guy – he pushed the door right off its hinges and got out [of the ball turret]. The bombardier passed out in the nose turret and we thought he was a goner.

“It turned out the flame was fed by a broken oxygen line, and when the oxygen was used up, it went out! By then I was half way out of my seat and preparing to signal “abandon ship” when I realized things were not so bad, and finally got things back on keel again. However, we were now alone and I headed for the Channel, losing altitude at a rapid pace.

“When we reached about 10,000 feet or so, the bombardier’s voice comes on the intercom. He was alive and O.K. – just passed out from lack of oxygen.

“We very luckily crossed the Channel and returned to base without encountering any German fighters. The hydraulic system was shot out, but there was enough pressure still in those spheres to work the brakes. I should have stopped at the end of the runway and received a hero’s welcome, but I taxied back to our pad and coasted very slowly off the edge of it when the pressure finally ran out.”

About PRINCESS CHARLOTTE (also known as “Nice ‘N Naughty”), Comey wrote, “She got us home O.K. We were blessed with good fortune as far as the crew was concerned. I believe I saw her fuselage on the junk heap later. [Editor’s note: She crashed at Shipdham on 4 January 1944 while on take off.] I still have the stencil that says “PRINCESS CHARLOTTE” used on some of these planes. I completed 25 missions in the Princesses – some bore the name in paint. Others in mind only. Some bore two names, but as far as I was concerned, they were all Princesses, and all great.”

Louis Trouvé’s son Paul contributed these details: “I don’t know much about my father’s war experience since he didn’t talk about it for the most part, even to my mother...she told me that the last mission my father was on...was the only one in which he wore his parachute. This was also my grandfather’s (his father’s) birthday, 11 Dec. When he was ejected from the plane, the parachute opened on its own. He landed in a farmer’s field and was brought to safety by the farmer and his wife. He didn’t handle the parachuting well and his leg was badly injured in the fall but it was saved by a German surgeon. I do remember my father saying that the medical help he got was first rate and he had great respect for the German people because of their intelligence and enterprise.”

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Aircraft #42-7501, BING’S BIG BOX, returned with two injured crewmembers.

68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #42-7501, Howington	BING’S BIG BOX		Returned to base
68th Squadron Crew			
HOWINGTON, HARTWELL R. ASN 0-800356	Pilot	2nd Lt.	Cantonment, Florida
CURTIS, HERMAN M. ASN 0-748585	Co-pilot	2nd Lt.	Seaport, Maine
KASTEN, RICHARD J. ASN 0-683831	Navigator	2nd Lt.	Grand Rapids, Michigan
CROWL, WAYNE D. ASN 0-741141	Bombardier	2nd Lt.	Canterburg, Ohio
SHELTON, JACK A.	Radio Oper.	T/Sgt.	
SHAEFFER, CLAIR P. ASN 33187932	Eng./Top Turret	T/Sgt.	Wernersville, Pennsylvania

MITSCHE, MICHAEL P.	Staff Sergeant Badly wounded	Belly Gunner	S/Sgt.
HEITER, NICHOLAS M. ASN 17106849	RW Gunner	S/Sgt.	Bridgewater, South Dakota
BLAKLEY, CHARLES W. ASN 39831745	LW Gunner Wounded	S/Sgt.	Parma, Idaho
BOGGS, EARL E. ASN 18162560	Tail Turret	S/Sgt. Oklahoma	Porter,

*Note: S/Sgt. Michael P. Mitsche was seriously wounded by flak. It was his fifth mission. He was transferred to the 77th Hospital on 21 December 1943 and did not return to Shipdham. He was sent back to the United States. Eight members of this crew were lost on 21 January 1944. Four of them, Howington, Curtis, Kastnen, and Crow, were killed in action. They were on the same aircraft with Heiter, Blakely, and Boggs, who survived. Schaeffer was killed when another aircraft was lost that day.*

From Hartwell Howington's diary: "11 December 1943. Went out again today – to Emden. Roughest mission yet. Mitsche hit direct with cannon shell. Blakely hit with fragments. 138 fighters shot down. Blakely got Purple Heart and recommended for Soldier's Medal. Mitsche got one fighter. Crew got two possibles. Mitsche got Purple Heart, OCL, and Air Medal. Ship hit with five cannon shells. O'Neill exploded right in front of us. Sky littered with burning and exploding Libs parts and fighters."

## 16 December 1943

### Bremen, Germany

Intense, accurate flak was encountered over the target. One 68th Squadron aircraft was badly damaged over the target but the crippled craft made it back to England to crash-land on the coast.

#### 68th SQUADRON:

68th Sq., #41-23788 S, Jones                      AVENGER                      MACR #4709

#### 68th Squadron Crew:

JONES, PARKE H. Jr. ASN 0-674587	Pilot KIA, buried Cambridge (B-7-3)	1st Lt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
GRIFFIN, JOHN W. ASN 0-748630	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Corning, New York
PICCOLO, ANTHONY J. ASN 0-670165	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Omaha, Nebraska
BUCKHOLTS, JOHN J. ASN 0-669980	Bombardier KIA	1st Lt.	Okmulgee, Oklahoma
MARTIN, CHESTER A. ASN 13125993	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Girardville, Pennsylvania
FRIES, PATRICK J.	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Louisville, Kentucky
ZDONICK, MICHAEL P. ASN 31169351	Hatch Gun. KIA, buried Cambridge (E-0-38)	S/Sgt.	Naugatuck, Connecticut
TERWEY, ALPHONSE J. ASN 37281321	RW Gunner KIA, buried Cambridge (A-1-36)	S/Sgt.	Ward Springs, Minnesota

BESSE, WILSON P. ASN 38194491	LW Gunner KIA, buried Cambridge (E-0-43)	S/Sgt.	New Orleans, Louisiana
GORDON, RHODES C. ASN 13089150	Tail Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	McKees Rock, Pennsylvania

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Parke H. Jones was the pilot of AVENGER, and his co-pilot, Lt. Griffin said, "This plane was severely damaged by a direct burst of flak which knocked out our #4 engine, and damaged parts of the bomb bay while we were en route to the target. After the pilot and I both tried to regain control without success, Jones gave the order to bail out. Four of us left the ship, but the pilot and five other crew members did not follow. Why the pilot tried to take the plane home after ordering us out is unknown. Perhaps he regained some control is just a guess. The bomb bay was badly hit and it was impossible to contact the boys in the rear of the ship either by radio or to get back to see if they were injured when we were hit. According to hearsay, the plane crashed on the English coast and burned. Two bodies remained unidentified after the plane crashed. The four men who bailed out were taken prisoner within a few hours – these four being the navigator, engineer, radioman, and myself."

Capt. Charles Kuch, a 68th Squadron lead pilot, stated that observers in other planes said that this aircraft had #4 engine blown completely off and the #3 propeller was gone, so Lt. Jones had power on only the left side. The aircraft disappeared into a cloudbank with the front half of the catwalk hanging down out of the bomb bay! All were amazed that he was able to coax this plane all the way back to England. He then chose to "belly-in" on the first open area he saw – the beach near Hull. Unfortunately, he set her down in a minefield and the resulting explosions and fire burned and killed all six men remaining aboard.

The site of the crash-landing was near Skeffling, on an estuary southeast of Hull.

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## 20 December 1943

### Bremen, Germany

Once again it was another trip to Bremen, but this time the weather was clearer, permitting visual bombing and better results. As usual, the flak was heavy with eight of our ships sustaining damages. One aircraft did not return.

#### 506th SQUADRON:

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506th Sq., #42-7630 P-Bar, Maynor			MACR #1712
506th Squadron Crew:			
MAYNOR, WILLIAM M. ASN 0-666783	Pilot POW	1st Lt.	Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
GUNNELL, JOHN E. ASN 0-676780	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
GRAY, ARNOLD L. ASN 0-678637	Navigator POW	2nd Lt.	Providence Rhode Island
AHO, AUGUSTUS ASN 31121510	Nose Turret KIA, WOM Margraten	Sgt.	Schenectady, New York
CORRIGAN, JAMES L. ASN 31140327	Engineer POW	T/Sgt.	Fairhaven, Massachusetts

LISS, MICHAEL J. ASN 35312812	Radio Oper. POW	T/Sgt.	Cleveland, Ohio
SCANLON, WALTER J. ASN 32562495	Ball Turret POW, wounded, leg broken	S/Sgt.	Bloomfield, New Jersey
STOFFEL, GLENN C. ASN 17108124	RW Gunner KIA, WOM Margraten	S/Sgt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
COONELLY, JOSEPH M. ASN 13112426	LW Gunner POW, wounded	S/Sgt.	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
PARKER, JOEL Jr. ASN 12034648	Tail Turret POW, wounded, hemorrhage	S/Sgt.	Manasquan, New Jersey

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*Note: Sgt. Aho may have been a former ground man as he is credited with painting many of the nose art pictures on 506th aircraft – and possibly others. This was his fourth mission.*

Lt. Maynor said, “I don’t remember the call letters or the name of our ship as we were a replacement crew and flew several planes. On our 11th mission we went to Bremen and were hit by fighters as we approached the target. We were knocked out of formation and lost an engine, but continued on to the target through flak and bombed. After leaving the target, the fighters again picked us up and shot the plane up rather badly, firing point blank at us. We had only three guns left firing at them.

“We lost altitude to 9,000 feet and flew out over the North Sea at Wilhelmshaven, still losing altitude. We were nearly out of gas and the plane was becoming unflyable. The German fighters did not follow us out over the North Sea, so I had a decision to make – to ditch or to turn back to Germany. If we ditched, it was almost certain death, so I decided our best choice was to return to the coast and bail out. This we did. I was the last one out and just barely made it due to the centrifugal force of the spin.

“I only know about those of my crew who survived. I was with Gray and Gunnell in the POW camp.”

An official German report concluded that the aircraft crashed at 1207 near Langeoog at sea and that five men parachuted from the aircraft and were driven to the east by strong west winds. The MACR states that aircraft #42-7630 was attacked from behind and slightly to the right by one of five FW 190s. It was then seen to bank to the right and go into first a glide, and then a dive. Five to nine chutes were seen coming out of the aircraft. The aircraft may also have been hit by flak at the same time. It was last seen disappearing into a cloud.

Lt. Gunnell said that the two men who were MIA, Aho and Stoffel, must have perished in the North Sea after bailing out. Their bodies were never recovered. Parker and one other crewmember were rescued from the North Sea by a German pilot named Willy Koch. During the rescue, Koch found a letter addressed to Parker and neglected to turn it in to the authorities. He found it after the war and decided to contact Parker. Koch sent him a picture of his DO-22 seaplane.

Lt. Gray provided the following account: “Our final mission on 20 December, 1943 is stamped indelibly on my memory, as you can well imagine.



“Just after dropping our bombs on Bremen, we were struck simultaneously by flak and by enemy aircraft projectiles. Both waist gunners, Glenn Stoffel and Joe Coonelly, were badly wounded. Two engines were knocked out, and we began losing altitude at about 1,000 feet per minute.

“As we approached the North Sea coast, I attempted to learn, without success from the pilot, Bill Maynor, whether he wanted to ditch or should we prepare to bail out. Bill apparently decided that we should bail out as the alarm bell sounded with a series of short rings (prepare to leave the ship). I immediately summoned Augustus Aho, the nose gunner, who was in the front of the ship with me. We hooked on our chutes and opened the nose wheel doors, awaiting the final bail out signal, which never occurred.

“When I looked down and saw water below, I decided to jump and Aho followed me. I learned later that the rest of the crew left the ship after the ‘prepare’ signal. Mike Liss, our radio operator, and I landed in the water and were picked up by a German Air-Sea Rescue boat.

“As for Aho, the last I saw of him, he was parachuting behind me. I do not know what happened to him. Apparently, he was unable to survive the landing in the water. I do not have any information on Stoffel other than the fact that he was badly wounded.”

## 21 December 1943

### Practice Mission, West Bradenham, England

This aircraft crash-landed on Richards Farm in West Bradenham near Shipdham while on a test flight/practice mission.

#### 67th SQUADRON:

67th Sq., #42-72878 A, Butler	MISS EMMY LOU II	Crash-landed
67th Squadron Crew:		
BUTLER, RICHARD D.	Pilot Injured	Capt.
GRELL, GERALD C.	Co-pilot Injured	1st Lt.
NICHOLSON, ROBERT J.	Bombardier Injured	2nd Lt.
COINER, MAYO L.	Navigator	1st Lt.
NEEPER, LOY L.	Engineer	T/Sgt.
MASON, GERALD D.	Radio Oper. Injured	T/Sgt.
KOOKEN, WARREN K.	Gunner	S/Sgt.
CHAMBERLAIN, DONALD H.	Gunner	S/Sgt.
BOULANGER, CLEMENT C.L.	Tail Turret	S/Sgt.
GARZA, NICK E.	Armament	Sgt.
CLARK, FORREST S.	Gunner/passenger	Sgt.

This is Richard Butler's April 1990 account of the crash-landing: "Miss Emmy Lou II was the plane I was flying on 21 December 1943. The flight was a combination test hop and practice mission (group practice formation). I believe General Johnson was in the lead plane.

"The reason for the test hop was because the plane had been in for repairs after severe battle damage. It seems as though it was about two weeks before this on a mission, I believe, to Bremen." [Editor's note: The Bremen mission was 11 December 1943.]

"The crew was mostly my regular crew at that time: Jerry Grell, co-pilot; Nicholson, bombardier; Coiner, I believe as navigator; Neeper, engineer; Mason, radio operator; and gunners to be Kooken, Chamberlain, and Boulanger. Nick Garza from armament lived with our guys and was along for the ride. Forrest Clark was along for flying time – his first flight since bailing out from R.C. Griffith's famous one-wheel landing.

The flight was routine through till the formation breakup. We were at 800 feet, in the pattern for landing, when there was an explosion in the number two engine. With the explosion, the other three engines quit! Nothing to do but land straight ahead. We were headed right at a large tree but I managed to avoid hitting it with the nose, and it took it about at the #2 engine area. We hit, skidded, hit a ditch and the plane broke open.

"I tried to open my seat belt with my left hand, but there was a 90 degree bend at my left wrist – broken. So I managed to open the safety belt with my right hand and then went out through the left cockpit window area which was completely broken open.

"Upon getting out, I found that I couldn't stand up – my left ankle was broken. This probably was caused by the jolt received from the left rudder pedal when we hit the tree.

"People were coming out of the wreck from all kinds of holes. Fires had started and some shells were exploding. After taking roll, Nicholson, the bombardier, was missing. He and the navigator had been on the flight deck in preparation for landing. When I asked, 'Where's Nick?' Loy Neeper went back into the wreck through the top hatch. I can still see him coming back out while reaching back in and with one hand, lifting the unconscious Nicholson out and dropping off of what was left of the fuselage. For this action, Loy Neeper received a Soldier's Medal – well-deserved!

"We moved away from the wreck as, by this time, there was quite a fire with lots of exploding shells. I was crawling along as best I could and Neeper was dragging Nick.

"About this time a farmer, who owned the field where we crashed, came over and began helping some of us. Surprisingly, General Johnson was one of the first to arrive from the field. He had seen the crash from the air, got down quickly, into his staff car, and came over to us.

"Somebody tore a gate off the farmer's fence and used it as a stretcher to carry me. I remember Gen. Johnson helping to carry it and I was very embarrassed. Nick had regained consciousness by then and was doing a lot of moaning.

"We were very lucky! Besides my injures, Grell, co-pilot, had a broken right arm. Nicholson's injuries turned out to be some broken ribs and a bump on his head. Mason, my radio operator, was missing his left ear! When the explosion occurred in #2 engine, metal came through the fuselage and took his ear off completely. Someone found it, and at the hospital it was sewn back on and saved. Amazingly, that was the extent of the more severe injuries.

“There was a lot of speculation as to what really had happened. One theory was that there was an unexploded shell in the #2 engine from the battle damage that finally let go. A hole in the underside of the #2 nacelle had been patched, but the projectile not discovered. Another view was that we had encountered ice and that caused all four engines to quit. But I doubt that it would affect all engines at the exact same time. And, it doesn’t explain the explosion. Personally, I think the explosion severed fuel lines or the electrical system and that is why they all quit. There was a lot of damage to the left side of the fuselage along the flight deck before we hit the ground.

“Grell, Nick, Mason and I wound up in the hospital. Mason and Nick got out in a few days. Some time in January, Grell and I got back to the 44th where it was decided that we would be sent home as hospital patients as it would take so long for our broken bones to heal in the English weather. I remember Col. Dent was opposed to this action, but the flight surgeon, backed up by Bill Cameron, prevailed.”

## 22 December 1943

### Munster, Germany

The weather on this mission was terrible, with heavy clouds up above 20,000 feet and thunderstorms as well as very low clouds over Holland. Bombing was done by PFF, with results unobserved. Flak was moderate but accurate, and the 44th BG lost two planes, both from the 66th Squadron.

66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-7638 A, Miller	BIG BANNER		MACR #1714
66th Squadron Crew:			
MILLER, KENT F. ASN T-60679	Pilot KIA	Flt Of.	New Martinsville, West Virginia
TAYLOR, CHARLES E. ASN 0-680761	Co-pilot POW	2nd Lt.	Westfield, New Jersey
PASSAVANT, FRANK A. ASN 0-678758	Navigator KIA	2nd Lt.	New Matamoras, Ohio
SHAFFER, DONALD E. ASN 0-678477	Bombardier KIA	2nd Lt.	Los Angeles, California
BIRGE, EDWARD E. ASN 14080954	Engineer KIA	T/Sgt.	Chattanooga, Florida
CHILDERS, JAMES C. ASN 19087860	Radio Oper. KIA	T/Sgt.	Berkeley, California
PILCH, STANLEY Jr. ASN 35316138	Ball Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Cleveland, Ohio
LARSON, JOHN H. ASN 19108009	RW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Tombstone, Arizona
McCORD, GERALD D. ASN 39084175	LW Gunner KIA, buried Margraten (H-16-11)	S/Sgt.	Fresno, California
SHEEHAN, WILLIAM J. ASN 12124435	Tail Turret KIA, buried Ardennes (C-10-42)	S/Sgt.	Bellerose, L.I., New York

This plane, flown by Flight Officer Kent F. Miller, per the MACR, began lagging behind in the rear of the formation just after the target, tying in with aircraft #42-7533. It was variously reported as being seen lagging behind the formation up to 1437 hours. Each observation was that it was in apparent good condition, but was losing altitude and getting farther behind. At 1437 hour, it was last seen as it dropped beneath the clouds. At that time no chutes had been seen, and since the ship was apparently in “good” condition and under control, it is believed the crew had a good chance to bail out near the German border with Holland.

The MACR was correct as Miller and Taylor, the pilots, managed to get as far as the Zuyder Zee, approximately 25 kilometers northeast of Amsterdam, where they were still in heavy clouds but could go no further. Miller gave the bail out signal and some crewmembers did bail out but the bail out order was changed to ditching as soon as Miller learned they were over water. F/O Miller must have been stunned by the ditching as he did not leave the wreckage. Charles Taylor, the co-pilot, was the only man to survive, although he did get a life raft free of the plane and could see one or two other crewmen in the water near him supported by their Mae Wests. But by the time Taylor got the raft inflated, he did not have the strength left to help them or even to climb inside. He held on until he was rescued.

Sgt. Birge, engineer, apparently was trapped by his top turret. Sgt. Pilch got out of the plane, into the water, but must have passed out from shock and the cold water. Larson was seriously wounded, and when the Germans pulled him out of the water, he did not respond to artificial respiration.

*Note: The details above appeared in the original Roll of Honor. The material below has been added. Not all of the details align perfectly, specifically around the point of whether any of the remaining crewmen were able to get out of the ditched B-24, but both accounts are included here for the record.*

The co-pilot, Charles E. Taylor, wrote the following: “On December 22, 1943, our group bombed Muenster, Germany. We were flying on Oakley’s wing, and after leaving the target realized we were both losing the formation. Flak had damaged three of our engines and when we realized we would never make it back to England, Miller gave the order to bail out. Four of the crew did bail out in the rear, but when we opened the bomb bay doors, there was a break in the clouds and we saw we were over water, so the order was changed to prepare for ditching, which six of us did.

“We hit the water at over 100-mph and submerged immediately. When I released my seat belt, I floated free of the plane. No one else appeared in the water, which I have never understood! I swam around for a few minutes, thinking the plane would sink, but it never did, so I released one of the dinghies, which floated away from me. I caught up with it, but with my wet winter flying suit, flak jacket and Mae West on, I could not climb into it, but just put my arm over the side and passed out.

“Obviously, it was not long before a German patrol boat picked me up or I would have died from hypothermia within 15 or 20 minutes, I am quite sure. I was taken to a jail in Amsterdam, awaiting transfer to Frankfurt for interrogation, when I saw that Doug Powers, from Oakley’s crew was also there. We chatted for a few moments, until the Germans broke it up. After interrogation, we were sent to Stalag Luft.

“The war in Europe ended on May 8th and on May 13th we were flown to France in B-17s. In June we sailed home, and in September I was ‘separated’ from the service. The next month I went back to my old job with AT&T Long Lines Department.

“Thirty years later [in 1975], the Westfield police called me and informed me that the Royal Dutch Air Force had found my plane, after draining a large area of the Zuyder Zee. My wife and I were invited over to Holland to take part in a TV documentary NCRV was planning to make. They eventually recovered the remains of the five missing crewmembers, and sent them back to their families for burial.

*Note: The five crewmembers whose bodies were recovered in the plane were Childers, Miller, Passavant, Pilch, and Shaffer.*

“It took the Dutch over four months and many dollars and manpower to accomplish that feat, but they were and are still very grateful for our entry into the war which released them from German occupation. As a matter of fact, they still conduct an annual memorial service at Gronkin, on that reclaimed land, in memory of all airmen who perished on their behalf.”

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 66th SQUADRON:
 

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66th Sq., #42-7533, Oakley

MACR #1713

## 66th Squadron Crew:

OAKLEY, WARREN W. ASN 0-740893	Pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Seattle, Washington
COLLINS, RICHARD K. ASN 0-393514	Co-pilot KIA	1st Lt.	Ithica, New York
POWERS, FRANK D. ASN 0-673624	Navigator POW	1st Lt.	Jacksonville, Florida
CHRISTIAN, JAMES W. Jr. ASN 14266875	Bombardier KIA	T/Sgt.	Seberling, Florida
BYERS, JOHN F. ASN 37152819	Engineer Evadee, POW	T/Sgt.	Custer, South Dakota
FLEISCHMAN, ABEL ASN 32509819	Radio Oper. POW	S/Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York
SMITH, ROBERT F. ASN 17026292	Ball Turret KIA	S/Sgt.	Minneapolis, Minnesota
TIMME, ARTHUR C. ASN 12092338	RW Gunner KIA	Sgt.	Brooklyn, New York
WEAVER, LEWIS R. ASN 35401274	LW Gunner KIA	S/Sgt.	Columbus, Ohio
SONDAG, WILLIS ASN 17068404	Tail Turret KIA, buried Margraten (O-22-2)	S/Sgt.	Harper, Iowa

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The second 66th Squadron aircraft lost was piloted by 1st Lt. Warren W. Oakley and Richard K. Collins. The MACR contains this information: Aircraft #533 was reported as lagging in the rear of the formation just after target with bomb bay doors still open. Different crews observed this aircraft at various times between 1400 and 1431 hours and each one reported that it was losing altitude but apparently under control. Aircraft #548 (Heskett's) had been flying on the right wing and Heskett reported that he pulled alongside #533 to determine why they were not keeping up with the formation. (It was later learned that #533 had lost three superchargers.) Oakley motioned for him to go ahead and catch the formation. At 1431, the tail gunner of #548, saw the ship begin to spiral down below into the clouds. It was not believed likely that any of the crew survived as no chutes were seen to open.

A crew member, Sgt. Abel Fleischman, tells his account: “I was flying spare radio operator on this crew. First of all, we were hit by flak, and then jumped by about five to seven fighters. We couldn’t unload our bombs as they were stuck as were the bomb bay doors. Our bombardier, Christian, asked the pilot if he should unload them by hand, but the pilot said, ‘No. We are over enemy-occupied land.’

“The fighters knocked all or at least part of our tail off. After Byers (engineer) came out of the top turret and bailed out, I think we started to go into a spin, but I managed to get out as well. Just Byers and I got out. [Editor’s note: One more crewmember, Lt. Frank Powers, also got out.]

“Miller’s crew also went down the same day – that was my original crew with whom I trained. I landed by parachute in Holland (near Den Ham). After hiding out a couple of hours, was captured and taken to a Dutch hospital for about six weeks. Then to Frankfurt, Stalag Luft 6, 4, and 1.”

Lt. Frank D. Powers, navigator, adds, “We were a squadron leader and made our target. But we lost two engines on the return, our wingmen abandoned us, and flak or fighters hit the tail surfaces – and we spiraled down, out of control. T/Sgt. Christian, the bombardier, and I had no warning of how serious the problem was, so we stayed with the plane. (Pilots were so busy trying to regain control they couldn’t ring the bail out warning.) We thought that Warren Oakley would regain control. Byers and the radio operator (Fleischman) knew about the tail damage and they abandoned ship at high altitude. Had Byers warned us, we probably all would have made it. Christian, bless him, helped me put on my parachute and was killed by the jump. We were so low, less than 800 feet at that time, that Christian’s chute never fully opened.

“Before the local policemen arrived, a young man of about 25 or so, came up to me and in good English, said ‘I congratulate you – all of your friends are dead.’ At that time I did not know we were in the Netherlands and had the fleeting thought that he was a German and was going to inflict a terrible beating on me.

“Then a policeman, a young man about my age, 22, arrived and his sympathy was with me, but with the surrounding families knowing that I was there, he had to phone the German authorities and release me to them.”

I contacted the widow of John F. Byers, who gave me the following information: “John told me much of what Abel Fleishman told you. He also thought that they were the only two to get out. John was too big to wear his chute in the turret, so he grabbed it and snapped it on, but when he tried to pull the ripcord, he had it on upside down. In his own words, it scared the hell out of him, but as you know, it worked. He landed in a plowed field somewhere in Holland, went in to the top of his boots, and hurt his knee. Some men were there almost as soon as he landed – they helped him to a barn, then hid him in the hay, under gobs of hay. Soon S.S. men came with pitch forks, but he was hidden deep enough that they missed him. When they left, one of the Dutch men got him on a bicycle, took him in to town and to a doctor (Den Ham?). He stayed there over a Pub or bar until they could move him a few days later.”

John managed to avoid capture for a considerable period, had many close calls – too many to include in this report. Then an informer notified the S.S. and he was captured and became a POW.

P.C. Meijer, Dutch historian from Den Ham, Netherlands, has sent data about his investigation of this crew. “Last week I found the place where the Liberator came down, and met a farmer who lives near the place. The farmer, Mr. Bril, said he remembered all what happened, he was outdoors when the plane came in at low speed and was just above the roof of the barn. At first, he thought it was a belly landing, but it hit very hard. Then immediately, he saw an American come running toward him (Powers, who had just parachuted) and was yelling, ‘Bomb! Bomb!’ and making gestures to lie down – and he did. The aircraft exploded immediately and it was like a fireworks display with the ammunition exploding, fire, flares, etc. Pieces of the plane were strewn about. The explosions made a large crater seven meters deep and 20 meters in diameter, broke the windows in his house, and blew the doors open.

“One crew member landed about 30 meters from his house – Powers. People later told him that another chutist, Fleischman, came down southwest of his farm, and he hid in the woods and was soon captured. And the third chutist, Byers, was found and hidden by the other farmers in the area. In a very short time, the Germans arrived to take Powers prisoner, but they could not understand English, so brought in a teacher who spoke English to interpret for them. Later, he was taken away...”

In 1985, during the 40th anniversary celebration of the liberation of their country, the people of Den Ham honored this crew with speeches, flowers, photographs – they are remembered!

## 30 December 1943

### Ludwigshaven, Germany

The primary target there was the Chemical Works of I.G. Farben-industries which was bombed via PFF method through clouds. One aircraft did not return.

#### 66th SQUADRON:

66th Sq., #42-7548 I, Heskett	BULL O' THE WOODS	MACR #1752
66th Squadron Crew:		
HESKETT, DONALD J. ASN 0-530727	Pilot Evadee, returned	1st Lt. Junction City, Kansas
BILLINGS, JAMES R. ASN 0-676728	Co-pilot KIA, buried Epinal (A-20-41)	1st Lt. Guthrie, Oklahoma
RENDALL, WILLIAM A. ASN 0-678767	Navigator Evadee, POW	1st Lt. Buffalo, New York
ZIELENKIEWICZ, ADOLPH ASN 0-735010	Bombardier Evadee, returned	1st Lt. Chicago, Illinois
RISCH, ELMER D. ASN 38173842	Engineer Evadee, returned 20 March 44	T/Sgt. New Orleans, Louisiana
SYMONS, EUGENE ASN 33348877	Radio Oper. Evadee, returned	T/Sgt. Oil City, Pennsylvania
LANGCASKEY, STANLEY G. ASN 12132225	Ball Turret Evadee, returned	S/Sgt. Trenton, New Jersey
BLITZ, AULIS L. ASN 33204357	RW Gunner KIA, buried Epinal (B-22-53)	S/Sgt. Baltimore, Maryland

CREGGER, CHARLES W. ASN 7023872	LW Gunner Evadee, returned	Sgt.	Nebs, Virginia
MILLER, GEORGE R. ASN 33237069	Tail Turret Evadee, returned 20 March 44	S/Sgt.	Woodbine, Pennsylvania

1st Lt. Donald J. Heskett was the pilot of this plane. The MACR included this account by Sgt. Elmer D. Risch, engineer: "I knew this crew quite well due to a shortage of engineers and top turret gunners. I made two missions with them: one was Kjeller and then this mission to Ludwigshaven. Our load was fire bombs and both bomb bays were loaded full with the 80 or 90 pound type. Just before crossing the Channel, I pulled all the arming pins myself so the bombs were armed and ready to go off on contact.

"We were hit by enemy fighters at 3 o'clock, a little higher than level. I was in the top turret facing the rear. As they came in, they gave us the works, one behind the other. We were flying high and on the outside of the formation. Bullets were ricocheting because I was hit in the left leg twice and the left heel from the rear, or front of the plane.

"The pilot soon gave orders to 'Prepare to bail out' on the interphone, so I left the turret and the interphone system. I opened the bomb bay doors and stood on the catwalk. When the radio operator (Symons) started to come to me, and I saw Lt. Heskett leave his seat, I went overboard. I never saw Lt. Billings, and I never saw anything in the waist of the plane. I never saw anyone of the crew or heard about them until I got back to England.

"When in France, I was told that two planes had crashed in that neighborhood. The name of the plane (I was on) was BULL O' THE WOODS with a large bull painted on the left front side, snorting smoke. I made a free fall in my chute and didn't pull the ripcord until I went through the clouds. Then, in a matter of seconds, I was on the ground. I did not see the plane crash..."

William A. Rendall, navigator, added to the story, "The original Heskett crew was assigned to the 66th Sq. on 14 August 1943. Don Heskett had been a Flight Officer, came up from the ranks, and was married. Ed Risch was flying as a replacement for Chocklett, who was otherwise scheduled that day. We had been assigned to do some GEE-Box training, but were called for briefing on very short notice. Sgt. Elmer D. Risch was flying as a replacement that day for our engineer, who was being court marshalled that day for decking an MP in Norwich.

"As I recall, we were about 14 minutes across the coast in Abbeville Country when Heskett moved from the box to fill in an open spot on Coffin Corner, due to an abortion at the coast. He swung a little too wide and that was a signal for an attack from 3 o'clock by three FW 190s. Blitz was killed instantly on the first pass and Miller took a metal fragment through his elbow. Controls were damaged on the right side, and we started losing altitude in a slow turn.

"Heskett rang the bail out bell, and I was not able to get any answer on the interphone, so I started through the tunnel to go up on deck, but found that the bail-out dinghy in the passageway had snapped onto the pocket of my leather flying trousers. I finally got the other snap of the dinghy free from its ring, and went out the nose wheel door with the dinghy still attached to me.

"It was a difficult free fall with that darn dinghy slapping around, and I had to open up higher than comfortable. When the chute opened, the pocket with the escape kit left along with the dinghy.



“Langcaskey, after getting Miller out of the plane, had one of the most amazing escape stories I have ever heard. But Langcaskey has since died of a coronary. Heskett walked out through Portugal. I went back to France in 1972, and back to the crash site to recover some of the pieces of BULL O’ THE WOODS. I learned that Billings’ body was recovered at the crash site, as was Blitz’s, and they had been buried side by side by the French until they were moved to Epinal, at the American Cemetery.

*Note: For Stanley Langcaskey’s story, see the 2nd Air Division Association’s “News Letter” dated June 1975, page 3, story by William R. Robertie.*

“We all landed within two miles of the crash site near Chavigny, north of Soisson. Don Heskett set a speed record for return to the base; but for me, I made the mistake of showing off my college French to the chief of the first Resistance Group that I contacted (and who was a Chief of Police). He then found me very useful in moving English and American airmen. On June 19th, 1944 the Gestapo got me in France...”

In another letter, Rendall noted: “We were hit by ME 109s as we moved to low, outside wing, 14 minutes over the French Coast, going in. The BULL O’ THE WOODS crashed north of Soisson, near Chavigny, with Sgt. Blitz, waist gunner, and who was killed on first pass, and Lt. Billings (reason unknown) still aboard. Most of the parachutes fell within a two-mile radius of the plane.

“A French family helped me across the river at Soisson on New Year’s Eve and I walked SE by night for ten days. After I made contact with an organized group of the French Resistance, I was active in an evacuation program for airmen and refugees until the Gestapo infiltrated on 19 June 1944. Then Chalons-Sur-Marne and Fersnes Prison in Paris before evacuation to Germany. Finally made a Military POW at Stalag Luft III (Sagan). It was over run by the Russian Front on 1/30/45. Then a long march to Mooseburg and liberated by 14th Armored Division 30 April 1945.”

Some details are available on the evasions of Cregger, Heskett, Langcaskey, Miller, and Risch. Risch was first in contact with the “Burgundy” escape line (reseau Bourgogne) and then was handed over to the “Shelburne” line (as was Sgt. Cregger). The former came out of France by boat on the night of March 19/20, 1944 (Operation Bonaparte IV) and the latter on the night of March 16/17, 1944 (Bonaparte III). Heskett was on the first Bonaparte Operation on the night of January 28/29, 1944. Stan Langcaskey was a “Burgundy” evader too, but like most of the Allied airmen who made it back to England with his organization, he crossed the Pyrenees Mountains. Miller possibly was involved with “Burgundy” also, but this is not confirmed.

*Note: Additional details on evasion, specifically the story of Milton Rosenblatt (Sobotka crew, 21 January 1944) can be found in the Summer 2001 8 Ball Tails newsletter.*