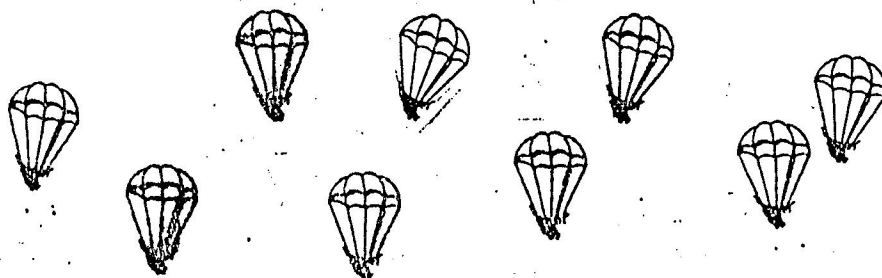
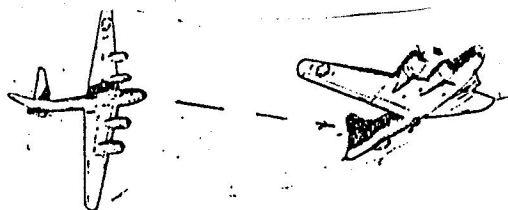
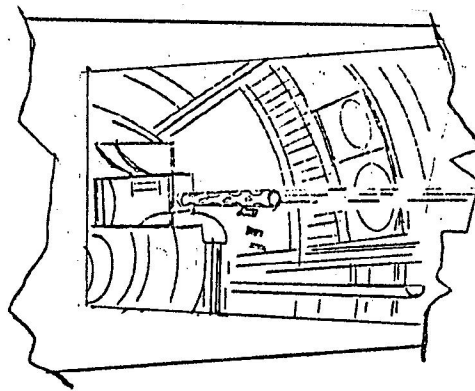
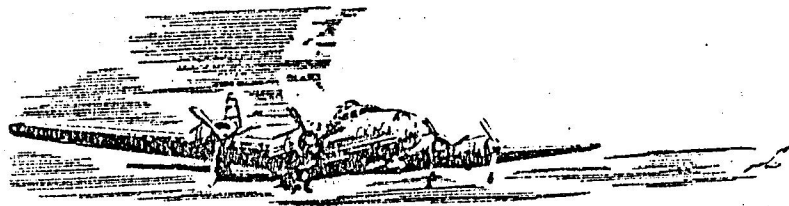


# BAILOUT



## BAILOUT

Capt. Norville Gorse, USAFR

Raid #1, 96th Bomb. Group, St. Omer Airfield, France;  
May 13, 1943

B Flight Leader  
Plane No. 42-29752  
337th Bomb. Sqdn.

96th Bomb. Gp.  
4th Prov. Bomb. Wg.

8th Air Force  
Grafton Underwood AAB, U. K.

Pilot, Capt. Derrol Rogers  
Co-Pilot, 2/Lt. Norville Gorse  
Nav., 1/Lt. Joseph Hudson  
Bomb., 1/Lt. George Rawlings  
Eng., T/S Basil Maxwell  
Radioman, T/S Robert Bennett  
Tailg., S/S Robert Dominic  
Waistg., S/S Edward Youngers  
Waistg., S/S Edwin Wulfekuhle

"Miss Poisonality," our assigned A/C, was in the hangar awaiting repairs on May 13th, the morning of our 1st scheduled mission.

At 10:00 A. M., the loud speaker system ordered all crews to the briefing. Our crew didn't expect to be listed for the mission because of our non-operational plane, but we went anyway.

Since we were in Senior Flight Leader Rogers' crew, we were surprised that we were to fly an unassigned plane in a Tail-End-Charley position.

Takeoff was scheduled in one hour. The group was to form over the base and later rendezvous with three other groups near Market Harborough. We had just one hour to pre-flight the plane, load ammunition and mount the guns.

We began our takeoff roll, gained speed, lifted off, raised the gear and started our climb to the left to assemble. Rogers watched the formation out of his left window while I synchronized the props and monitored the instrument panel.

Suddenly, at 500' altitude, a big bump jarred us against our safety belts and the nose of the plane reached for the sky. Both Rogers and I instinctively pushed the control column full forward and rolled out of the turn. With a maximum effort I straightened my arms and pressed hard against the seatback. The plane hung on its props even though the control column was full forward against the rudder pedal support bar.

After several minutes, the nose settled and we munched along, still climbing, on the edge of a power stall. I then propped my knees against the control wheel and eased the load on our arms while maintaining a gentle turn to the left. The right aileron was free, its cable cut by the machine gun burst; without aileron control and with a missing right horizontal stabilizer, we would have lost control of the plane in a right bank.

Rogers then gave me the controls so he could direct subsequent

action. He sent Maxwell to the rear of the plane to establish what happened, then told me to start a shallow turn to the left and return to England. Thus began my two hour stint at the controls until bailout.

Maxwell returned in a few minutes and said the right waist gun fired out of control, shot off the right stabilizer at the root and cut the right control cables; the left control cables were untouched. The Tailgunner was wounded seriously and bleeding freely; the Waistgunners had lesser injuries from flying metal.

We had been ordered at the briefing not to break radio silence, so Rogers sent Maxwell to the Radio Room to tell Bennett to contact the Tower with his key. The Tower gave him permission to use the Command Set.

Rogers then talked directly to the Tower and was told to drop the wounded by parachute over the field, circle and drop the rest of the crew, and then head the plane out to sea before he and I jumped.

The bomb bay doors could not be opened hydraulically, so Rawlings and Maxwell opened them manually (a slow process). The bombs could then be salvoed and the Commissioned Officers could jump through the Bomb Bay. Rawlings and Maxwell spent considerable time making sure the salvo would go smoothly.

Maxwell returned to the pilots' compartment while Rawlings was still opening the bomb bay doors, giving me an opportunity to tell him to bring me some rope or straps to tie down the control column so Rogers and I could exit safely.

Maxwell returned in a few minutes with a chock rope and I tied my control column to the rudder pedal support bar. Though the column was tied tightly, considerable arm force was necessary to keep the plane from stalling.

We had circled back to the water by then, so Rogers salvoed from the pilots' compartment according to Rawlings' instructions. We then returned to the field for the next event, our bailout. Maxwell and Youngers asked the Tailgunner if he could pull his ripcord, concluded he couldn't, put a chute on him, pulled his ripcord and pushed him out the Waist Door over our airbase.

The crew, except Rawlings and Hudson, then bailed out through the Waist Door, landing across the airfield and into the neighboring farm fields.

Rogers contacted our local RAF Air-Sea-Rescue base by radio, through the Radioman, and their plane soon joined us. Rawlings and Hudson bailed out through the Bomb Bay near Kings Lynn, just before we reached a coast line mine field. Rogers and I continued to the North Sea just off Cromer.

The engines had been laboring for some time and the plane had been losing altitude despite running at full throttle. We were very low as we crossed the shore line.

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Rogers told me to jump. The engines began misfiring as I left my seat, so I sped back to the bomb bay and dropped out. On reaching the slipstream, I rolled once, saw the plane, pulled the ripcord, felt the chute open, oscillated once and looked down to find the water just below me. The plane could not have been more than 400' above the water when I left it.

Loosening my harness, I dropped into the water from about 20 feet above the choppy sea. After entering the water, the shoreline undertow took hold. I didn't stop sinking until I could pull off my boots (about 20' below the surface) and swim with full strength toward the surface. I was just able to hold my breath long enough to reach it.

With life vest inflated, I looked for the plane and Rogers, but saw nothing. Hudson later told me Rogers was picked up after me, dead from exposure. He was a dedicated officer and duty bound. Through skill and leadership he saved the crew's lives.

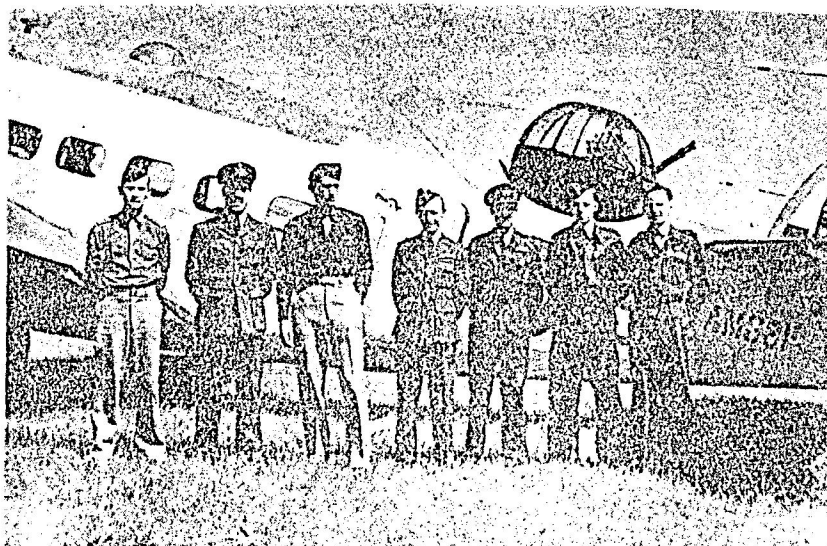
I waited about an hour before an Air-Sea-Rescue RAF Lancaster flew over, circled and returned, dipped a wing and headed toward the mainland. A half hour later, a rescue boat stopped close by. The crew pulled me out of the water with a large hook at the end of a pole.

I spent the next four hours sleeping in a well kept RAF BOQ at the Air-Sea-Rescue base, awoke to find my neatly pressed uniform on a chair beside me, and was informed that I was expected for dinner at the Base Commander's Residence in  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour.

The Base CO introduced me to his wife and sibling children during dinner. His family was cordial, reserved and interested in the rescue procedure.

The CO and I were then driven to the RAF Base Flight Line and flown to Grafton Underwood in a RAF search plane. The below photo was then taken.

After well wishes and goodbyes, we disbanded and returned to duty.



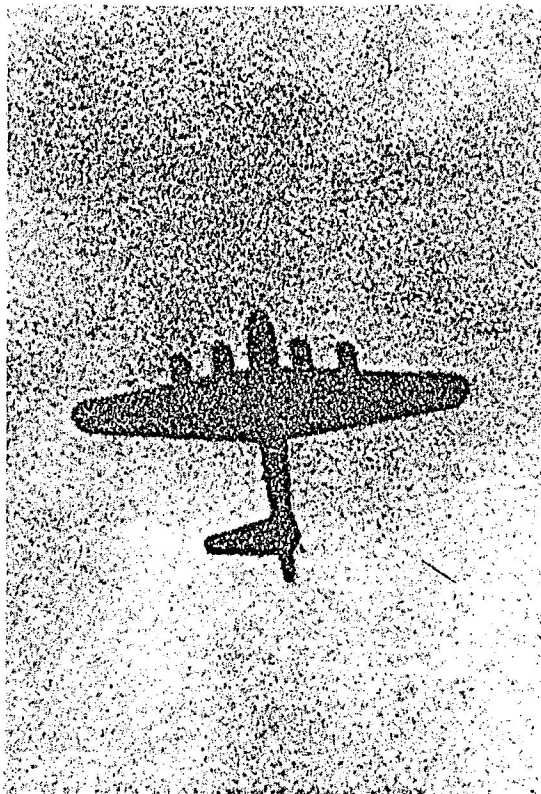
Lieutenant Hudson and crew

Excerpt: Freeman, "Mighty Eighth War Diary," (N. Y., 1981) p. 58.

## INCIDENT

On 13 May 1943 VIII Bomber Command's operational strength doubled in one go as the 4th Provisional Wing groups flew their first mission. It was not an auspicious debut for when the leadship of the second combat wing had to abort due to an oxygen leak in the ball turret, the whole formation (96th and 351st Groups) became disorganised and returned to base. One bomber was lost through an unusual accident. Shortly after take-off from Grafton Underwood 96th Group B-17F 42-29752 was critically damaged by a run-away machine gun. The weapon was in the left waist, internally stowed and was being checked by the gunner when accidentally discharged. Bullets went through the side of the fuselage and shot away half the right horizontal stabiliser and severed the control cables on that side of the bomber. The waist gunner was injured and the tail gunner seriously wounded by the

burst. Pilot, Capt Derrol Rogers, managed to keep control but found he could only fly the aircraft in a gradual turn. Coming back to the vicinity of the base the wounded tail gunner and the other five men in the rear of the bomber were ordered to bale out, after which Rogers continued in a wide circle towards the Wash where the bombs were jettisoned. Believing that the damage to the aircraft would make a safe landing impossible, Rogers had the bombardier and navigator parachute and when the orbit brought the bomber back over the Wash he and the co-pilot followed. It was an hour and a half before 2/Lt Norville Gorse, the co-pilot, by then suffering from exposure, was found and rescued from the water. The search continued in the Wash for Rogers and when eventually located he was found to be dead. This tragic accident brought a directive that in future guns were not to be adjusted or primed while in the stowed position.



Disabled B-17 over Grafton-Underwood, England,  
May 13, 1943.