

TRAIL OF THE "LONESOME POLECAT."

AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT HAPPENED ON OUR MISSION OF MARCH 1G, 1944 RY S/
SGT. LOUIS R. LIENING - RIGHT WAIST GUNNER WITH MEYER CREW ON 42-38 IGO
"LONESOME POLECAT"

We were up early that morning about 0230. We caught the trucks for the mess hall and ate the usual chow, two fried eggs, hot cereal, fruit juice and coffee. Then on down to briefing where everyone was in a hurry and buzzing around as usual.

When all were in and seated, the S-2 Officer uncovered the map; all expected another trip to the "Big B." Instead, there was that long black tape reaching from England all the way across Northern France into the Southwestern part of Germany to the Target, "Augsburg", a Messerschmitt assembly plant. It was obviously a long haul. Briefed nine hours, seven on oxygen, five over enemy territory.

Our Group was flying lead group in lead Combat Wing which meant we were leading the entire Eighth Air Force over the target that day. We would be flying at 21,000 feet, temperature forecast to be minus 30 degrees.

We were to have fighter cover all the way out. P-47 (Thunderbolts), P-51 (Mustangs) and P-38 (Lightnings). Flak as always but the navigator should take us around most of it.

After the briefing we went to the Armament shop to check over the guns and from there out to the ships to install them. The ship "Lonesome Polecat" (#160) was brand new and had never flown a mission. After we finished our work we went to the mechanics tent to put on our heated suits.

The weather at take-off time was as normal: All fogged up. We made a Buncher assembly at about 13,000 feet.

All went well as we reached the French coast. We were flying over a solid cloud cover, only a peek at the ground now and then. We picked up our first P-47 escort almost on time. Saw a few enemy fighters in the distance, but none came in.

About an hour and a half past the zero hour, we began to pick up enemy fighters in good numbers. Then all hell broke loose. They caught us between change of escorts. Someone called out attacks on the low group.

Our orders were to hit the target. Jerries' must have been to stop us at any cost. They hit us on first attack and hit us good. They came in head-on through our formation, between 25 and 40 planes.

Plane on our right wing went straight down, must have blown up below us, because we never saw him again.

Jerry got us in several places. Blew out the entire plexiglass nose, injuring the Bombardier in the left foot, put a hole in #2 main tank, direct hit on #4 engine which knocked it out almost immediately, tore holes in the left Bombay door and a direct hit on the Ball Turret which shot the door off and injured the Ball Gunner (S/Sgt. Page) in the right thigh (very bad wound) and in the left shin where some fragments lodged. The attack put both the chin and ball turret out of action. The wounded men were placed in the radio room.

The Navigator's charts and log were lost through the nose. The blast of air from the hole in the nose was so strong and cold, it was soon necessary for the Navigator to go to the radio room.

Meanwhile we were still holding formation but 2500 RPM and 45 inches of manifold pressure on three engines just wouldn't do it. We dove to the low group thinking we could stay with them.

We stayed with them for 15 minutes but the drag caused by the nose being blown off and #4 wind-milling (it wouldn't feather) was just too much. Our best airspeed was about 120 MPH.

Electronic Superchargers were giving trouble too, they wouldn't synchronize sometimes surging to 62 inches individually.

The Engineer started firing green flares and we started throwing things overboard. Bomb Bay doors wouldn't open by motor so the Engineer cranked them down by hand and toggled the bombs out. Doors wouldn't close either by motor or crank.

Tried to salvo the ball turret but the tool broke while trying to release it. Radio was out so we threw it overboard.

By now we were down to 13,000 feet still above the overcast but could see the Alps off to our right. Our airspeed was 100 MPH and #4 was vibrating dangerously.

Switzerland was about our only change so we took a magnetic heading of 190 degrees.

Shortly after we headed for Switzerland the vibration from #4 prop became so great it shook the ship like a leaf on a tree. Finally it came off and went spinning up, over and behind us.

About this time we lost all power from #1 engine. Prop wouldn't feather - evidently it was burned up while trying to hold formation. #2 tank was getting low. The Engineer had to transfer fuel.

About this time we spotted fighters off our wing. They looked like ME-109s but were firing flares. We acknowledged with flares and they came in close. It was then we saw the Swiss markings (White Cross on Red background).

They signaled us to follow them and we did for a while, but were losing altitude so fast we couldn't clear the peaks, so we couldn't make it to the field at Zurich.

So the bail out signal was given at about 1,000 feet. We were in a valley and could see a couple of villages and a large lake.

All the Gunners went out the main escape door including the Navigator. The Co-Pilot went out through the bomb bay. We didn't delay opening our chutes because we knew there was no room to spare, just a few swings and we were on the ground.

We were picked up by the Swiss soldiers and taken to the Swiss Army Headquarters in Baar. While here, we learned that the wounded men had been taken to a hospital, also that the Navigator (Lt. Williams) had died from injuries he received from the jump.

We learned too that Lt. Meyers had ditched the ship in the lake and had escaped uninjured. We were treated well by the Swiss. They fed us, gave us cigarettes, drinks and all they could possibly do to keep us comfortable.

Translation from an article appearing in the March 17, 1944 edition of the Zegerbieter Daily Paper published in Zug, Switzerland:

An American Bomber Crashes Into The Lake Of Zug Crew Saved

Yesterday (Thursday) just before mid-day an airplane was heard flying rather slowly and not very high westward. A few minutes later at exactly 12:15 the sirens were heard. At about 12:45 the plane was heard again coming from the southwest. The sky was clear and soon one could notice an American Bomber accompanied by two little Swiss planes one to the right, the other to the left of the Bomber.

Surely the Swiss planes wanted to lead the Great one to Dubendorf landing field, but the pilot kept on turning the Bomber above the village. Having made half the turn something glittered in the air, it got longer and longer and as it opened one could recognize it as a parachute. A second one, a third one, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth and a seventh one, after that it seemed as if a black ball fell from the plane. With great anxiety, people could see that it was a man whose parachute did not open. About ten meters from the earth the umbrella opened and it luckily stopped the heavy fall a little. A ninth parachute jumped in the air and so the eight men went slowly to the

earth. The first one landed in a tree the second one near the "Sennwind" with the third one beside. Another one got to sit on the roof of a barn belonging to the Haushier family. He smashed a few bricks from the roof, all the men landed more or less well. The machine was still in the air it was certain that the pilot searched for a landing place probably a water landing. He did so then and crashed into the Lake of Zug. Before the plane sank the last man was seen jumping into the lake as there was enough row boats about he was soon taken aboard.

One man of the crew was heavily wounded by the fall but also during the Bombardment of Augsburg. Later on another member of the crew was taken to the hospital. He had to be operated on. His life was in danger. A third man was also taken to the hospital.

The men of the crew seemed to be from 20-26 years of age. The six soldiers were boarded at the Lindenhof later the Pilot in Chief joined the rest of the crew. A First Lt. 26 years of age, he was heard called Maier (Meyer). The Pilot was wet to the skin. The munitions which were thrown off the Bomber before its landing were also brought in.

Some of the inhabitants of the village tried to shoot at the parachutists, it was rather up to date, but the crew seemed to know that they were in Switzerland.

Men on board the "Lonesome Polecat" listed in the order which they bailed out and where they landed in Baar.

S/Sgt. Louis B. Liening (Right Waist Gunner) - in an orchard

T/Sgt. Carl J. Larsen (Togglier) - in an orchard

S/Sgt. Charles W. Page (Ball Gunner) - in a front yard

S/Sgt. Jerrell F. Legg (Tail Gunner) - on a railroad track

S/Sgt. Elbert E. Mitchell (Left Waist Gunner) - on a house

S/Sgt. John Miller, Jr. (Engineer) - on a house

T/Sgt. John E. Wells (Radio Operator) - in a front yard

2nd Lt. Robert L. Williams (Navigator) - killed during jump

2nd Lt. Boyd J. Henshaw (Co-Pilot) - open field

1st Lt. Robert W. Meyer (Pilot) - ditched ship in Lake Zug