

Letter from **Major Joe Garrett**, Squadron Commander dated 21st April, 1989 to the nephew of S/Sgt. **Saul Spivak** who had been his Ball Turret Gunner on Jerk's Berserk, the B-24 Liberator USAAF bomber Serial No. 44-40443 on its last mission of WWII from RAF Mendlesham in Suffolk on 24th August, 1944

BOARD OF REGISTRARS

Cherokee County, Canton, Georgia

Dear Mr. Spivak

Mr. Ray Sutt?on sent me a copy of the letter you wrote him asking about your uncle S/Sgt. Saul Spivak. I was the Pilot-in-command of the 34th Bomb Group that day. I was Squadron Commander of the 4th Bomb Squadron and flying with Lt. Mackey and his crew.

We were assigned a military target at Kiel, Germany that day and given an assigned altitude of 17,000 ft. which was way too low given the accuracy of the flack guns at Kiel. We had been by that city before at a much higher altitude and had picked up quite a few holes in our equipment.

We hit our initial point southwest of the city and started our bomb run. Just before dropping our bombs there was a tremendous thump and the airplane lurched to the right. We had a direct hit by flack on the No.4 engine and the right wing. We started losing altitude immediately. A quick look showed the No.4 engine hanging out of the wing at about 45 degrees. The gear stowed to be put of the uplocks and the bomb doors were open about three fourths of the way. We tried to close the bomb doors, but they would not move so we assumed we had no hydraulic pressure.

We thought about going to Denmark but, since we were still flying, we hoped we could get back to England. By the time we cleared the coast of Germany or the islands west of Kiel we were down to about 10,000 feet and still losing altitude. I asked the crew to throw out everything they could find to get the weight down. That helped some but not enough. I might mention here that it took both feet on the left rudder and full left aileron to hold the airplane in the air. (*I've read that "You didn't fly a Liberator, You wrestled with it"- Tim*)

When we reached 1,000 feet we still could not hold altitude and, to make matters, worse, the Flight Engineer told us we had about 3 minutes gas left. We were pulling? power from the other 3 engines. We thought about ditching the airplane, but we had previously let the air-speed get to around 145 mph and at that speed we started into a stall. Our chances of survival were small hitting the water in a B-24 at that speed.

I asked the crew to line up on the catwalk that was in the bomb bay and told them to jump when I would be right behind them. Since they all had individual dinghys attached to their parachute harness I knew they would be together in the water.

In seconds I looked back and they were gone. I turned loose of the controls and tried to get up. The airplane immediately started a turn to the right. Now, of?ther dinghy I set on got hung on the centrifugal force of the airplane in a right hand turn kept me from getting clear of the seat. I suspect the dinghy hung on something because later I shook the dinghy loose and had no trouble getting out.

When I got the airplane halfway under control I wasn't over 25 feet off the water. I found that the airplane would fly straight level with full power on 3 engines and, by getting the airspeed up to 155 mph I could then gain a little altitude before losing the speed down to about 147 mph. I did this for a little over 2 hours, knowing all the time I was going to run out of fuel.

The rapid loss of or a malfunction in the fuel gauges must have given the Flight Engineer a bad reading. Although the gauges were right behind me, I was never able to turn round and look at them, since I couldn't relax on the controls.

In a little over 2 hours I could see the Cliffs of Dover (*more likely Cromer? - Tim*) and kept praying I would not run out of fuel with England in sight.

On reaching the coast of England I had managed to gain altitude to a little over 900 feet. My chest parachute, which I had strapped to my harness before the crew bailed out, was still in place. During the latter part of the flight I had managed to release the dinghy from the harness. I pointed the airplane back out to sea, took two or three steps and jumped out the open bomb bay. The airplane took a 270 degree turn to the right before hitting the ground and skidding under a house. Luckily, no one was home.

The crew was spotted the next day but the weather was too rough for the rescue airplane to land. They were never seen nor heard from again.

Some three weeks later I got back to my base and learned the crew was "missing in action". I wrote to all the families telling them essentially what I have written you. This is the first time I have put this experience on paper in 44 years.

It took quite a while for me to get over this experience and I have wished a thousand times that the crew could have gotten back instead of me.

I hope this answers some of your questions. If you have more questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely

Joe Garrett