

" Another unbelievable shot down story "

The December 20, 1943 mission for the 390th Bomb Group was Bremen. The big, bad Bremen. We had been there before and vividly remembered the enormous flak barrage. Our crew was part of the 570th Squadron.

Pilot ^{2nd Lt} Bill Riley
Co-Pilot ^{2nd Lt} Robert L. Fowler
Navigator ^{2nd Lt} Ed Kodis
Bombardier ^{2d Lt} Red Mulloy
Top TGT ^{1st Lt} Ray Brooks
RG. s/sgt. Carboneau
BTG s/sgt. Fura
LWG s/sgt Bob Hansen
RWE s/sgt. Ray Sell
Tail G s/sgt Frank Marianni

By the time we reached the French Coast our #4 engine, that had just been replaced was heating. We backed off a little on the power and relaxed our tight flying position on the outside of the formation. About 15 minutes before we were ^{supposed} to make a ninety degree turn to the left toward Bremen #4 ^{Engine} was smoking! and we were falling behind.

We had dilemma! We could see German fighters trailing our formation waiting for stragglers. We did not have fighter escort this deep into the Continent.

We decided to "cut across shorty" to join the intended run to Bremen because #4 had to be shut down, windmilling and smoking.

Then all hell broke out, flak was hitting us as we were losing altitude. Another engine was smoking. ME 110's and FW 109's began their shooting gallery. The ME 110's were coming up under us making huge holes with their 20 mm Cannons. Our gunners got 4 or 5 fighters, but we were badly crippled. Most of the controls out, the auto pilot out and couldn't dump our bombs. We dove the plane down to the tree tops to protect our belly, Red lining all the way. Another engine on fire, we realized we weren't going to get back to Framlingham. We thought we might be able to make our way to Sweden, but about this time we skimmed over the trees right over Wilhelmshaven on the coast and they shot everything they had at us. Cap pistols, BB guns up to 105 mm Cannons.

We could ditch or bail out. Ditching was out because we knew that we would last 30 minutes in the North sea in December. So Riley ordered everyone to bail out. Up to this point no one had been injured, which was incredible. Lt. Ed Kodis, the navigator was the first man out and we found out later from the Germans that he drowned in a Canal. I'm sure he was shot while in his parachute, because we were under fire all the time the crew was bailing out. Riley & I were fighting to control the plane halfway level. We both stood up behind the pilots seats. The plan was to dive out the front hatch on the count of three. I beat Riley to the hole and got my chute open at about 1000 feet.

I saw the plane with six ~~hundred~~ ^{thousand} Pounds of bombs still aboard crash through a forest. No explosion and I did not see Riley chute out. As I was coming down in my chute I could picture in my mind a squadron briefing the week before presented by a guy in a body cast telling us how Not to land in a parachute, Backwards. I manage to get face forward just as I landed in, about 2 foot of snow on a Wehrmacht drill field!

Two German soldiers ran towards me shouting "Hands Up" Everytime I put my hands up the chute would drag me filling my A-2 jacket with snow.

I finally disregarded the rifles and dumped the chute and unbuckled. They marched me to the Day room where a Sargeant set me down in a chair. He got on the phone shouting German. They did not search me, but when I reached for my Cigarettes & lighter they took them away from me.

About 2 hours after dark, a Luftwaffe Sargeant came, searched me and locked me in a little paddy wagon.

The next hour or two he picked up the rest of my crew. Then Lo and Behold! there came Riley alive, grinning but limping with one flying boot missing.

I Couldn't believe it, I thought he had gone down with the plane. Riley said your' right! He said after I dove out of the plane, it dipped the left wing so bad that the centrifigal force prevented him to make it to the hatch. He then got back in Pilot's seat and shoved ^{the} wheel forward to get it over with in a hurry -

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Riley said the plane skittered through the trees tearing one wing off and the throttle quadrant had his right foot pinned down. He managed to slip his foot from his boot, fell outside the plane, and crawled away where the Germans found him.

"Now that is unbelievable"!

Gathering our crew took nearly all night and by morning we were in Bremen where they paraded us through the streets, people jeering and spitting at us. Seemed like hours & hours. They lined us against a brick wall, placed a tripod machine gun in place as if to execute us. Our youngest sergeant Ray Brooks mumbled to me he was scared, so I told him I was too, but not to let the SOB's know that. He mumbled that made him feel better. After this ordeal they took us by train to Frankfurt on the main where we were put in solitary confinement about three days. They threatened being shot for being gangsters and spies to get information. We didn't know anything and didn't tell them anything. We got out on Christmas Day 1943.

They put us in a box car with other prisoners with one bucket of water and three loaves of the hardest black bread I ever saw.

We were sent to Stalag Luft I, Barth on the Baltic Sea. There were about 100 British pilots there that had been shot down at Dunkirk in 1939. We managed to survive but starving til May 1945 our German captors informed us that Hitler had ordered all prisoners of war be marched to Berlin or be liquidated because the Russians were coming our vicinity. We flat refused to budge and the guards left during the night.

We took over the towers, rounded up what livestock we could find, a few paratrooper prisoners knowledgeable of booby traps etc.

Went over to the adjoining air port and "debugged" the premises, got the radio's going and in contact with London. The mayor of Barth wanted to send all their women and children out to our camp, but of course our officers refused to take that responsibility. When the Russians came to Barth, it was reported that the mayor shot his wife and daughter then ~~hung~~ ^{poisoned} himself.

I was happier to get away ^{from} the Russians than the Germans. The Russians had to document everyone before we could leave the camp.

We were finally flown out to Rheims, France to Camp Twenty Grand, a tent city reception center for Prisoners of War. We were fed soup and soft foods and Eggnog because our stomachs were shrunk.

For several days I would walk through many thousands of ex Prisoners till I found our sergeants who had been interned in Austria. They were together and well.

We left Le Harve, France on a Liberty Ship June 1, 1945 and arrived 15 days later to New York and the magnificent Statue of Liberty.

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570th Squadron
William Riley Pilot
I was Co Pilot

December 20th 1943 Bremen Germany
cannot be at Reunion

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I want to add some more details that was left out of the brief article that was printed in the booklet compiled by David Waterill for the 390th Bomb Group Veterans Reunion in Tucson, Arizona.

The last 3 months, in Stalag Luft 1 we only got barley soups, Cabbage soup with a half rotten potato once a day, then at the last we ^{only} got a bowl of rutabaga soup about 1 P.M. Each day.

When the Russians came into our area they thought they were liberating us. When in reality we had things in our control, had radio contact with London asking for paratroopers and food. We had been instructed to stay put & they promised to fly us out to France - which they did about a month later. We had rounded up a few head of cattle, hogs, geese etc and had them on a peninsula where we planned to orderly slaughter & eat but the

Russians discovered them and machine gunned all of them. So when we heard about this I told some guys in our barracks to go cut some steaks and I began to tear the barracks down to make a fire so we could have a "Texas Bar B Que!" After eating we got sick and vomited, our stomachs were so shrunk we couldn't handle it. We kept trying - and they did taste good going down but not too good coming back up.

The Russians told us that they were going to take us ^{by trucks} to the Black Sea! That is all the way across Europe! We knew we could never make it. Finally some adjutant General officers came and nullified that plan - The Russians detained us until we all were documented and had passports, which was very frustrating to us waiting to go home. Some of the guys took off behind the Russians. This was very risky so most of us waited.

On Mother's Day 1945 the B-17s came to airlift us to Le Havre France. The plan was this: using only one runway on adjacent airfield, 500 up to sundown a fleet of B-17s would make a bucket-brigade pickup, taking 35 men at a time. The Team to 15 thousand men organized into groups of 35. As each rescue plane landed - and almost before its wheels stopped rolling - a group of 35 would be ready to climb aboard. We were trucked to "Camp Twenty Grand" where

I remember getting a badly needed haircut by a Italian Prisoner of war. He used a straight razor, a comb and then used a lighted candle to finish. I was a bit leery of a ~~Enemy~~ waving a straight razor! We were promised a new uniform and a \$100 then might get to go to Paris for R&D. Most of us got the \$100 but no uniform. I waited for uniform and never made it to Paris, however a bunch of my friends took off for Paris. Later when we reported to Miami Beach Florida for re-orientation I talked to a few of these fellows. They had a wild time in Paris, and when their money was gone they would go to the Paris Headquarters and act like they had just escaped from a prison camp. then get another \$100 and a uniform. one guy told me that he went through this process several times before they sent him home.

I want to record in chronological order my term of service in the force. I had always wanted to fly - never dreamed I would be able to. After two years of college at John Tarleton Jr. College I ran out of money. Came home and luckily got a job at the Tator, ^{1940 I think} Cement Plaster Co. at Plasterco. at 3 1/2¢ an hour. Living at home I saved money, bought a second hand car, a 1937 Ford coupe. War was declared Dec 7 1941 - then I heard that

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Anyone single & healthy with two years college could volunteer for Aviation cadets, so I went to Sweetwater to take physical, and found out that I would leave that day if I passed! Well I had not resigned my job or made that kind of preparation so I told them I would come back later after I had made my arrangements. Later after I quit my job I went back, and found that the situation had changed - after passing physical and had to take a test, they told me that would call me. So I waited and run out of money, no job so I volunteered into regular Airforce subject to appointment to Aviation cadets in July 1942. Finally got appointment when I was at Sheppard Field Wichita Falls. in October started pilot training, graduated July 1943 as Twin Engine Pilot 2nd Lt. Ellington Field, Texas 4 days before graduation a hurricane came through our base. ~~another~~ another wild story -

I thought I would go to B-25 or P-38 Twin Engine training, but the B-17 4 engine losses so bad in Europe they sent me to Walla Walla, Washington for B-17 training. We went over seas on the Queen Elizabeth Nov. 1943. My base was Framlingham south of London. The winter weather in England was miserable for flying. Our first mission was Dec 16 1943 to Bremen, Germany, we made that one ok except one engine was heating & smoking coming home. They replaced that engine and we went on our last mission to Bremen Dec 20, 1943 when we got shot down as I have stated before we left LeHarve, France June 1 1945 arrived New York June 15th ~~they~~ we went by Train to Ft. Sam Houston, Texas where they gave me shots etc and a 90 day rehabilitation leave at home.

Everyone at Hamlin treated me like a hero! Everything was rationed, sugar, gasoline, tires etc, but the ration board gave me a bale of gas coupons & for tires for an old 1941 Dodge sedan I bought -

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Marge was working at the Wagoner Drug Store, we started dating and I tried to get her to marry me. She kept putting me off. We could have a wonderful honeymoon at Miami Beach where the Air Force had all of these large Hotels reserved for ex-prisoners of war re-orientation. Marge said she wouldn't marry me while I was in the service, so I was able to get out on points after the Japanese surrender which happened in August 1945 while I was at Miami Beach. When I got home she then said I had to have a job! So I got a job with Stanolind oil & Gas Exploration Department as a Surveyor, then we got married on weekend and went to work at Portales New Mexico Monday morning!

Robert Fowler
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