

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT #13548

25 March 1945

B-24 JSH Liberator

Bomber Serial Number: 42-50646

Nickname of aircraft: *none*

8th Air Force, 448th Bomb Group, 712th Bomb Squadron

Based at Seething, England

Target: Underground oil facility at Buchen, Germany

Wreckage located at: SCHNEVERDINGEN

Summary: On 25 March 1945, Lt. Knute P. Stalland took off from Seething, England with a crew of 12 on a bombing mission to an underground German oil facility near Hamburg. Stalland's Liberator was the lead ship, possibly because his plane was equipped with radar bombing equipment. The weather was clear as the plane began its approach from the Initial Point 40 miles southeast of Buchen. At approximately 10:20 Stalland's plane was attacked at 22,000 feet by ME-262 jet fighters of the Luftwaffe. The fighters hit the area of the flight deck with 30mm gunfire which probably killed or seriously wounded several of the crew including both pilots. Within seconds the plane was engulfed in flame and began a tight spiral to the ground when the plane was hit inside of #3 engine. The right wing suddenly broke off and the plane exploded with the loss of the remaining wing. Only Lt. McHugh, the Bombardier in the nose of the plane had time to parachute before the plane exploded. The detonation of the fuel tanks blew the plane apart and threw the Radio Operator, Navigator and possibly other crewmen clear of the plane. The Navigator, Lt. Whitson was preparing to jump through the nose wheel hatch when the explosion blew him clear. The Radio Operator, SGT Bobbie Glass, regained consciousness to find himself free falling outside the plane. Only these three survived and all were captured. The remaining nine crewmen were killed in the attack, in the explosion, when they fell without opening their chutes or when the bomber struck the ground in a shoe factory at Schneverdingen.

The crew consisted of the following:

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 1st Lt. Knute P. Stalland | Pilot | Killed In Action |
| 1st Lt. Theodore Warner, Jr. | Co-Pilot | Killed In Action |
| 1st Lt. John M. Heard | DR Navigator | Killed In Action |
| 2nd Lt. William C. Whitson | Pilotage Navigator | WIA & Captured |
| 2nd Lt. Roland T. Hauver | Radar Navigator | Killed In Action |
| 1st Lt. John S. McHugh | Bombardier | Captured-POW |
| T/SGT Frank E. Grogan | Engineer | Killed In Action |
| S/SGT Bobbie C. Glass | Radio Operator | Captured-POW |
| SGT John M. Kropp | Waist Gunner | Killed In Action |
| SGT Oryn M. Blashe | Waist Gunner | Killed In Action |

SGT Dale W. Overy
SGT Joseph Parks

Top Turret Gunner
Tail Gunner

Killed In Action
Killed In Action

Details: Whitson and McHugh were in the nose compartment when their Liberator was raked by 30mm gunfire from one or more of the attacking ME-262 jet fighters. Both men immediately knew the plane was doomed and within 5-6 seconds McHugh bailed out the nose wheel door escape hatch with Whitson intending to follow when the plane blew up and threw him clear of the burning wreck. Whitson was apparently injured by the explosion but the extent of his wounds is unknown. According to his statement, Radio Operator Bobbie Glass was in his compartment over the wings above the bomb bay when the plane exploded. He was rendered unconscious by the concussion and only came to after falling 10-15,000 feet. His next recollection was seeing his parachute dangling by one clip. He attached the remaining clip and pulled the rip cord only to be captured shortly after landing. It would appear Whitson sustained injuries and required hospitalization upon capture.

All of the crew was listed as Missing In Action after their disappearance. According to statements made by all three survivors, they saw no chance that any other crewman could possibly have survived. Each survivor's written statement left no doubt that they felt the other nine were killed.

This was the 14th mission for the crew although two of the survivors were new. For Whitson and McHugh this was their first mission with Stalland and according to Glass' statement, this was only the second mission for Lt. Hauver with the crew. It is not clear why but in McHugh's statement he wrote, "I believe he [Hauver] was one who was blown out and couldn't open his chute - due to unconsciousness."

German interrogators told Glass, McHugh and Whitson that the other nine men died in the wreck or landed very close to it. The survivors were told that the bodies inside the fuselage were burned and were shown the dog tags of several including Stalland, Warner, Heard, Hauver, Grogan, Kropp, Blashe and Overy.

The Germans told the survivors that Stalland and Warner were found still in their respective seats in the wreckage of the cockpit.

According to McHugh's report, SGT Kropp, the waist gunner was last seen by SGT Glass "in the waist of plane & said he was on fire." Whitson wrote in his statement about Kropp, "Body found either in fuselage or immediately beside it. (Several bodies were out of plane, but identities unknown to me.)"

Whitson also wrote about Navigator - Lt John Heard, "Probably pinned in the plane - one round of 30mm shells very likely hit the flight deck. Explosion of plane made further escape from fuselage impossible." Glass' statement sheds further light on Heard's fate. Glass wrote, "He was the first to die since he was sitting almost immediately where the shell bursted." McHugh stated what a German interrogator later showed him: "I saw his A.G.O [Adjutant General's Orders?] - All Burned."

Of the three survivors, only Lt. McHugh mentioned hearing the Bail Out bell.

Each survivor was asked to document the last time they heard or saw the nine other crewmen. Whitson wrote that he last heard from the co-pilot, Warner, as he attempted to contact a group of P-51 fighters. He also recorded his final contact with Stalland thus, "Our last conversation was in regard to position and speed of ship while being attacked by ME-262s." Whitson last heard from the DR-Navigator, Lt. Heard, as they "compared positions (DR & pilotage) shortly before attack."

In Whitson's opinion, the fate of Stalland was sealed as he "Probably tried to straighten out plane after rudders and entire tail assembly had been shot away. Failing in this, it was too late to escape due to the tight spin. Very shortly after, the wings blew off, and fuselage dropped quickly."

McHugh wrote about Stalland: "He was either directly wounded, suffocated by fumes from fire or killed with concussion of the explosion and went down with the plane."

The Missing Air Crew Report for Stalland's plane does not contain any first hand information about the burials of the nine men who were killed. It appears that the survivors were told that the Germans recovered all nine bodies and buried them in a cemetery in Schneverdingen from which they were probably repatriated after the war.

Somewhat of a mystery remains in this story as regards the Tail Gunner. Except on the listing of Next-of-Kin and a letter written by SGT Glass, there is no mention of SGT Joseph F. Parks in the file. Glass wrote:

Sgt. Joseph Parks - Tail Gunner was also killed. No questionnaire was enclosed for him. He was always with our crew until the end and had the same May missions as pilot, & the same dates. He didn't have time to get out either.

In a matter of 5 seconds or so after being hit the plane was an inferno & blew up shortly after rt. wing fell off. I passed out shortly before the plane blew up trying to put my chute on. After falling 10-15 thousand ft. I came too, seeing my chute dangling on one hook. I was riding over the rear bomb-bay in radio comp. & ship broke there or else I would not have been blown clear.

The German interrogator also said that two of their bodies were found near the wreckage with chutes on but had not been opened. So I would say they were the ones in the rear of ship who almost but not quite made it out in time.

Warner, Kropp and Overy were known to have been married.

The MACR has a complete listing of the next-of-kin along with their World War II addresses but the microfilm for this page is badly out of focus and therefore extremely difficult to read. It would appear that their home states were as follows:

| | |
|----------|----------------|
| Stalland | Minnesota |
| Warner | Indiana |
| Heard | Tennessee |
| Whitson | Kentucky |
| Hauver | Maryland |
| McHugh | Texas |
| Grogan | North Carolina |
| Glass | Texas |
| Kropp | Wisconsin |
| Blashe | Wisconsin |
| Overy | Ohio |
| Parks | New Mexico |

Above information compiled 15 March 1995 by Brian Lindner from MACR #13548
located in the U.S. National Archives at College Park, Maryland

All quotes are exact - including misspellings.