The Death of A Crew

The Wayne Case crew was formed from a patchwork of Kroells, Sheley, Liedtke and Martin crews. Case was upgraded to pilot after serving with proficiency as co-pilot on Carl Kroell’s crew. Roswell Mayer had been CP to Richard Cole. Ed Sheley, a West Point graduate was promoted from Pilot to 704th Operations on arrival in England and his crew were all re-assigned. Sheley’s Bombardier, Jim McLean, and Navigator, Joe Boulos, were assigned to the newly formed Case crew. Lt. Robert Liedtke transferred to the 409th BG, flying A20 Havoc light bombers for fifty missions. He had developed a severe sinus infection and could not handle the altitude required with Heavy bombers. Liedtke’s airmen filled the vacant spots with the exception of the radio operator. Bagwell, Kendall, Whitton, Douglass and Rachal, transferred over to the newly formed Case crew. Radio Operator Lewis Phillips’ transfer from Don Martin’s crew completed the crew complement of ten.

They left their former crew-mates to come together as a new unit to support and protect each other in whatever way possible in the conflict of combat. They would become friends, living together, playing together, flying together and dying together.

Wayne Case  Pilot
Debriefing after the morning mission, Case remarked to a friend, he was so tired he did not think he could get the plane in the air for the PM mission. A prophetic remark!

Roswell Mayer  Co-Pilot
Dale Howard knew Lt. Case and Roswell Mayer from flight schools on this side of the Atlantic but being in different squadrons they rarely saw each other at Bungay. That day Dale saw Roswell in debriefing after the morning mission and called to him to “shoot the breeze”. Roswell said to him, “I just finished my 25th mission. The next five are on General Doolittle.”

Jim Rachal Armourer Gunner
“Jim was a great guy, playful and laughing. We became good friends at Gunnery School. He had a guitar and would play country and western music. We called him “Rattler” because he sang a song about a rattler that went --”Yo, yo rattler, yo, yo”. He was from Louisiana and had quite a Southern drawl. After we arrived in England, we didn’t see each other as much since he was assigned to the 704th BS and I was with the 707th BS. He palled around a lot with other rebels there.” Art Livingston

Amuel Canant  Bombardier
Canant, on another crew, wanted to make up some mission numbers and volunteered to fly with the crew on this mission. Would like to know whose crew he was on.

Noel Douglass  LWG
Douglass was the oldest member of the crew at 29. An AF Gunnery instructor before Pearl Harbor and needed in that post, he had volunteered to go overseas, wanting to get in to the fight.
Lewis Phillips  Radio Operator
Lewis Phillips wrote this letter to be delivered in the event of his death or imprisonment.

20 Jan.1944, England

To My Darling Mother,

I am praying at this time of writing that you did not have to open this letter, as it means that I am missing in action. Through the kindness of a boy from my hometown, this letter will reach you uncensored; therefore, I can say many things that otherwise I could not.

If you feel that the shock is too great for you and you cannot go on living - then you defeat the very purpose for which I died. I would not encourage any fake hopes, but a small percentage manage to bail out and it may be that I did. It all depends on what kind of message you receive about me.

I have completed three missions at this writing. I say to you that what I am doing is a most dangerous business, and I suppose that there is some means by which I could get grounded, but then, you wouldn’t want a son who is yellow - and I could never live with myself later on, if I had done this.

Let me tell you that I have called on Him up there in the vast stretches of the blue, four and five miles high, when the going gets tough, and He has never let me down, and I tell Him how much I appreciate it, even before we land back here at our base. God is my Pilot.

We will meet again - in the promised land - I am gone before you and await your coming. Now, I put my arms eternally about you and hold you close to my heart.

Your devoted son,

Lewis

Included in the letter but edited for the sake of relevance to this story, was a detailed narrative of the original Group’s route and experiences flying the southern route to the UK and Bungay. Phillips was with the Don Martin crew at that time.

There are no recorded personal stories about the other crew members regarding that mission but their names and their home states we can record.

Joe Boulos B, Portland, Maine.
August Kendall G, Oakland, California.
Emmett Bagwell G, known for his basketball skills, Vance, Mississippi.
Morgan Whitton G, Alstead, New Hampshire.

EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS

27 April 1944, Lt. Case and his crew flew the morning mission to Wizernes. They returned with the oil line shot out and numerous flak holes in the “Ronnie”. This day was the beginning of back to back missions in preparation for D-Day. This statement from “Fields of Little America” by Martin Bowman. Assigned to fly the afternoon mission and with the “Ronnie” disabled, they embarked on the “Dragon Lady”. The 13th plane in line for take-off, carrying the maximum load of 12 - 500 lb. bombs, they encountered
difficulty getting airborne. Approaching the end of the runway, wind shear caught the
tail of the plane flipping it over * and into the firebreak (this was a deep ditch)
surrounding the airfield causing the plane to go through the RAF communications
building and explode in the field across the road. It was 4:00 P.M.
*There are mixed reports as to whether the plane flipped or not.

Lt. Jim McLean, Bombardier on the Case crew, had finished his thirty missions two
days before the crash. Watching his crew take-off, he saw the plane lose control causing
it to crash into a brick radio shack killing the two RAF men inside. McLean, wrote the
navigator’s family a down wind hit the plane at the end of the run-way, Lt. McLean and
Joe Boulos, Bombardier and Navigator had been inseparable friends and comrades for
two years.
Excerpted from a letter to Boulos’ father by Lt. McLean 704, Case crew

I am what you might call an eyewitness to the crash. I believe I was the next aircraft
behind his. Because of the crash we could not take off and the rest of the mission was
scrubbed.

I was the pilot of “Henry’s Pride” having joined the 704th in Denver. We were in the
same hut with Wayne’s crew. I, especially remember Jim McLean as he flew with me on
my first, and almost last, mission – that’s another story.

Floyd Griesinger 704th Pilot

The last take-off of Wayne Case’s plane is forever etched in my memory. I can see,
like it happened yesterday - the plane going off the runway - rolling across the taxi way –
Wiping off the landing gear in the ditch at the end of the runway - smashing through the
hedgerow and erupting in a ball of flame when it struck the radar shack. At the time and
many times since then I wondered what was going on in Griesinger’s mind as he took off
over that burning wreckage.

Frank “Hoot” Gibson 706th RO/M

One wrote the family that the plane had made a third attempt to rise from the ground
and the wheels burst. It slid into a ditch and into a radio shack and exploded.

Unknown eyewitness

I did not know Lt. Case, mainly because I was basically a loner. Being first pilot, age
19, when I arrived in England, it was all I could do to absorb what was going on,
maintain the confidence of my crew and not reveal how old I was. However, it is my
clear recollection that I was standing on the upper area of the control tower at Flixton
during the take off of the aircraft of the 446th BG at the start of the mission on which Lt.
Case was killed. I was personally concerned for Lt. Case because it was my
understanding at the time that he had flown a number of missions with very little time
between them and that he should have had some time off. The wind was light - almost a
cross wind - not a full head wind. As the planes continued to take off (it takes awhile for
four squadrons to get airborne), it appeared to me that the wind shifted from a cross wind
to a light tail wind as Lt. Case came down the runway. Again, if my memory correctly
serves me, I saw the aircraft attempt to abort by applying the brakes and then all hell
broke loose as the wheels came off and it burned up. Of course, all the crash equipment and ambulances were rushed to the scene along with many people on foot. I started out foot running towards the crash area but soon changed my mind as my presence obviously would serve no useful purpose.

I must warn you that the above is to the best of my knowledge but my knowledge may be faulty. It is surprising how vivid the scene still is to me, however, I was not privy to the results of the investigation.

John Goss, Pilot 704th Bomb Squadron

I worked in Headquarters of the Group as Personnel Sergeant-Major. Our headquarters building was about 100 to 150 yards from the crash site. The first we knew anything was wrong was when we heard the explosion. Planes had been taking off for several minutes on their mission of the day. We were told at the time that the plane never got off the ground; it jumped a ditch, plowed through the RAF radar shack and exploded. There was speculation then that there had been a sudden wind shift, and the plane had a tailwind as it started its roll. Our runways were short, and loaded planes needed every foot to get off. I know there has been speculation that the plane was sabotaged, but I do not know if there is any proof or not.

There were many tragedies like this. One day our Group was returning from a mission. They came over the field in formation and peeled off one by one to circle for a landing. One crew had just finished their tour of duty, and were a little eager to get on the ground. They peeled off of formation too soon and locked wings with another aircraft and they both crashed killing twenty men.

We had some very brave men flying for us. They flew into skies that were filled with German fighters and lots of flak. You can rest assured your uncle and those others who died with him were the bravest of the brave.

Roy Windham Group Headquarters to Walt Mayer, cousin of Roswell Mayer, CP

Two missions were carried out on April 27, 1944. During the morning mission to Wizernes (mission #60), “Satan’s Sister” crashed shortly after take-off into a flock of sheep and the pilot and top turret gunner were killed. The second mission to Blainville (mission #61) Wayne Case’s plane crashed on takeoff killing the whole crew. I recall planes taking off over the burning plane and going on to the finish the mission. My memory may be flawed but the records show there was a second mission flown that day. Maybe only the planes that were already in the air continued. After fifty years memories fade.

When they were cleaning up the wreckage on the end of the runway one of the bombs went off as they lifted it killing one and possibly two armament personnel. I can’t verify that, only that a bomb exploded when they were cleaning up and everybody was saying an armourer was killed.

I did go down and look over the crash site after the bombs were removed. There was very little left of the airplane of any size. What impressed me was there was nothing left of the radar building but the cement foundation and it could not have been cleaner if it had been swept with a broom.

Frank “Hoot” Gibson 706th RO/M
Jack Neilands worked in Tech Supply. His job was to salvage parts of planes they flew in too damaged to fly or that had crashed. When told of the Case crash, he responded “that was the plane that went off the runway and blew up. I was one of the first ones at the site.” When questioned as to what he saw, he responded that it might seem macabre but his job was to get parts and that is what he kept his mind on. He added that you become very hardened to what you see.

_Jack Neilands, Tech Supply 706th BS_

I am writing on behalf of my parents, Reginald and Elsie Wright, both of whom are eighty eight years old. They remember the crash that killed your uncle on 27th April 1944. I remember it too, I was a boy of eight and a half then and remember being taken indoors because of exploding ammunition. None of the family actually witnessed the crash.

_Peter Wright whose family lived at Abbey Farms, the site of the crash._

I was on duty and my glass room was crowded. All I remember is when the A/C was taking off I saw the right landing wheel leave the R/W and within 3 seconds it veered right and crashed into “SBA SHACK”.

_Fred Borchert  Air Controller observing from the Tower_

“The spring of 1944 was to prove to be a very eventful time for me. As well as April being the time of my eleventh birthday, which brought extra sweets and chocolate from my American friends, it was also the month that I had a very frightening experience with a crashed Liberator. This happened when, as usual, I was standing on my favorite gatepost watching the Liberators take off for a raid. Watching them roar off the main runway in quite quick succession my attention was drawn to one as it appeared from behind the maintenance hangar, not least because it was still on the ground, when it needed to be at least four feet in the air to clear the hedge at the end of the runway. But it didn’t rise above the ground and as it ploughed through the hedge sending debris high into the air, it was then that I noticed that this Liberator had a blue emblem on its nose that looked distinctly like an eagle with its wings spread behind it in the diving fashion.

I continued to watch in a mesmerized fashion as the Liberator continued its journey across the road through another hedge and into a field, where it smashed through a wooden shack and came to rest in an upright position about one hundred yards further on. For an instant, that seemed longer, it just stood there in a perfect upright position, as if it were on a dispersal pad, and momentarily I thought that it was all right, then, with an enormous explosion it totally disintegrated in a flash. The blast from the explosion swept across the field and I fell backwards off the gatepost. I was not aware of how it happened but when I found myself on the ground I was facing away from the explosion and soon running for the security of my home. On my way I ran into my worried mother who was on her way to see if I was alright.

It was many years later that I learnt that all of the crew and the two RAF men in the wooden shack had been killed, although at the time I could not see how anyone could escape from that explosion. Although I didn’t show it, after over fifty years I still felt very emotional about that Liberator, because over the years I had begun to think that I was the only one to witness this sad event.”
We flew the first mission and came back around noon or pretty close to that. We were walking back to the barracks in the afternoon. Everybody all at once just kind of stopped and turned around, something caught our attention. You can tell when there is something wrong with an engine running. He was trying to take off and it seemed like he could not get it in the air. He lifted a little bit and it just didn’t want to go anywhere. It seemed like he was bouncing it a bit. The wheels caught the fence, dragging it and he crashed in to the Radar tower. The wind had changed direction and Case was trying to take off down wind. That is one reason he couldn’t get lift. They just cracked up and everybody got killed, even the 2 men in the RAF shack.

Sid Raley 705 TG

I was standing at the other end of the runway. I do remember seeing it. You don’t often see something like this. I don’t think it flipped. It never even lifted off. It was full throttle all the way. Got down to the end of the runway. Don’t know if he hit the brakes a little bit to veer off, I’m not sure.

Everyone was watching it, waiting for it to take off. I know that after it was over, there were just four engines sitting there and the tail. Generally, when one of those bombers burned, that was all that was left. Realizing it was not going to get airborne, I wondered if the controls were locked. A B-24 controls can be locked when the plane is on the ground and nobody is around it so the controls don’t flop in the breeze. The engineer generally unlocks it so they can get to the end of the runway to take off. Course, we weren’t in the plane so we don’t know but some of us thought the controls were locked. It was just a guess on our part that it could have been that.

Renwick Meyer 707th Ground Crew

“On this day the Group flew a morning mission to St. Omer, France, a noball target. It was the final mission of my tour and I was happy no end. On the way home my Co-Pilot Nate Jacobson let me sit in his seat and fly the “Bird” for about fifteen minutes. Really a thrill I will always remember. Later that day the Group would fly the second mission. Two members of my crew and I were in the post theater watching a movie when the crash occurred. The explosion shook the entire base. We took our bikes down to the sight of the crash keeping well back as the ammo was cooking off. It was then I learned the identity of the crew. My good friend, Jim Rachal, was on that ship. Jim and I went thru Gunnery School together at Kingman, Arizona. He was a fine fellow and I felt terrible.”

Art was reluctant to comment at first when I specifically asked him about the bodies and the possibility they had been thrown out. These are his comments:

“I am certain that the bodies stayed intact in plane. As soon as the fire was out, the rescue people took the bodies to the morgue on the base. I can’t remember but thought someone said that one crew member had jumped out.”

I then asked him if it was really a possibility that one had jumped out. He replied, “No, I really do not believe that happened.”

Art Livingston 707th BTG
Wayne Case crew, 704th Squadron, did not have a designated plane as theirs but like many flew what was assigned to them each mission. Douglass wrote home that they happened to fly this plane, “Plastered Bastard” the day the photographer snapped them.

Sitting L – R: Jim McLean B (Jim had finished his 30th mission the day before), Wayne Case P, Roswell Mayer CP, Joe Boulos N
Wayne Case, Roswell Mayer, Dick Cole and “Bud” Cather before briefing of the morning mission 27 April ’44. Case and Mayer were killed during take-off for the afternoon mission.
Southelmham St. Margaret Station,

27th day of April 1944.

Superintendent Hopes,

I beg to report that at 1600 hours Thursday the 27th April 1944 I was on duty in Southelmham St. Margaret when I heard a plane crash and saw a huge volume of smoke and flame coming from the direction of Flixtion.

I immediately sent a 'Snap' report to Hd. Qrs., via Divisional Head-quarters and then informed Sergeant Sawyer of Bungay.

I then at once went to the scene and together with Sergeant Sawyer obtained further particulars which were phoned to Hd. Qrs. The particulars being as follows:

U.S.A. Liberator aircraft.
Number of Aircraft, 306 K.
Pilots name, and 9 members of crew.
Pilot Officer, Case,
Co. Pilot, Mayer,
Navigator, Boulos.
Bomb Aimer, Canant.
Engineer, Bogwell.
Radio Op., Phillip
Gunnery, Kendall.
Rathal,
Whitton
Douglass.

Station, Flixtion.
Pilot and crew killed.
Plane crashed on a cultivated field, owned by
Reginald George Wright, Abbey Farm, Flixtion, Mr. Bun Map Reference, 774038.
Aircraft completely burnt out.
The cause of the crash was due to a sudden change of wind when taking off on operation duty.
The U.S.A.A.C. Flixtion furnished a guard at the scene of the crash.
The aircraft was loaded with bombs at the time of the crash some of these exploded at time of impact without doing damage. Fire Brigades from Bungay attended but all persons were kept away until the danger was past owing to the unexploded bombs remaining on the burning aircraft.

Arthur N. Street
P.C.No. 79.

26 Apr 1944
44th BOMBARDMENT GROUP
FLYING CONTROL
AAF 125
APO 598

April 28, 1944

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

STATEMENT OF FLYING CONTROL OFFICER:

B-24 306-K  Pilot lt. Case

The accident occurred on Thursday afternoon, 27th of April, 1944 at 1555 hours. 306-K King was the 13th aircraft
to take off in a formation take-off for an operational mission. As the ship was coming in on the Runway; Runway 23 into the
southwest, it was noticed by Capt. Bu-r, Capt. Conley and
myself that the wind had made a sudden shift of over 90 degrees
to a position wello on the tail of the aircraft, and was quite
strong. The ship proceeded down the runway gathering speed
and suddenly, about 100 yards from the far end, the brakes
were applied and the ship went off the end of the runway and
into the field beyond.

Swerving from the line of the runway the ship struck
the Main Beacon of the SBA, which was located about 200 yards
from the end of the runway, and completely demolished it.
After demolishing the Main Beacon the ship seemed to dis-
integrate and break up, finally coming to rest about 100 yards
beyond. Fire started and before any fire equipment had a chance
to get anywhere near the wreck, the entire plane was enveloped
in flames.

The ship was loaded with 500 lb. demolition bombs,
and with no chance to bring the fire under control, all per-
sonnel were kept at a distance until the fire had subsided
and the Ordinance Officer thought it safe to approach the
wreckage. A plane was placed, 1st Bom. Div., and the Station
Ordinance officer were notified, and the Crash Tenders and
Ambulances and Medical Officer were sent to the wreck as soon
as possible.

Met Reports:

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Visibility</th>
<th>Wind Speed</th>
<th>Cloud Base</th>
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<td>7 miles</td>
<td>WNW-13 m.p.h.</td>
<td>NLC</td>
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<tr>
<td>1600 Hrs.</td>
<td>5 miles</td>
<td>WNW-11 m.p.h.</td>
<td></td>
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CHADWICK O. SMITH
Capt., Flying Control Officer
RESTRICTED

WAR DEPARTMENT
U.S. ARMY AIR FORCES

REPORT OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT

128

Date: 27 April 1942

AIRCRAFT: (1) Type and model: (2) S.A.A. A-20-29
Station: (5) AF Station 205
Organization: (6) 5th AF Forces

Personnel:

Name

Rank

Status

1. Case, John S.
2. Layett, Raymond S.
3. Smoak, Ivan B.
4. Canary, Juan R.
5. Foxwell, Everett D.
6. Phillips, Lesli R.
7. Hinton, Corliss L.
8. Doughty, Charles L.
9. Fennell, Donald L.
10. Fennell, Lewis L.

Ranks

1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.
1st Lt.

Status

Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass
Pass

Air Force or Command

AF
AF
AF
AF
AF
AF
AF
AF
AF
AF

Status

On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty
On Duty

Personnel

Name

Rank

Status

DATE OF INCIDENT

May 1, 1942

AIRCRAFT DAMAGE

Completely destroyed - Junked.

WEATHER AT TIME OF INCIDENT

Visibility

2400 feet

Weather

Clouds

Fog

Sleet

Description

Fluffy

Overcast

Blizzard

Description

None

None

None

NONE

NONE

NONE

CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

Aircraft overshot runway on takeoff.

RECORDED BY

REPRESENTED BY

AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL

19424

NATURAL

INCIDENT

AIRCRAFT OVERSHOT RUNWAY ON TAKEOFF.

CAUSE OF ACCIDENT

WIND COMES FROM NORTHEAST OVER 30 DEGREES:

CLARIFIED BY AUTHORITY OF 5th AF.

RESTRICTED
DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT

On 27 April 1940, Lt. Wayne A. Cash was scheduled to fly B-24X 42-20035 on an operational mission. The aircraft was the 13th to take off in a formation take-off on Runway 23 into the southwest. The ship proceeded down the runway gathering speed when suddenly, about 50 yards from the end of runway, full brakes were applied and ship went off end of runway. The aircraft struck and completely demolished the Rain Beacon of the S.A.A.C. which was located about 200 yards from the end of runway. Two P.A.T. wireless operators in the S.A.A.C. station at the time were killed (names listed on reverse side). After striking the Rain Beacon the aircraft descended to 50 feet and broke up, an accompanying picture shows aircraft finally came to rest about 100 yards beyond the Rain Beacon, time 1555 hours. Fire broke immediately and enveloped the entire plant. There were six explosions, three 300-lb. demolition bombs and three fuel tanks, completely destroying aircraft.

EXPLANATION

As the ship was coming down the runway it was noted by flying personnel that the ship had made a sudden shift of over 90 degrees to the right side of the aircraft. It was quite strong.

For the preceding seven hours the direction of the wind had been between W and NW. During the take-off of this plane the wind veered sharply to the right and increased to 10 - 15 M.P.H. but decreased again afterwards 10.4 hours to 10 - 15 M.P.H.

The pilot of the plane taking off 90 minutes after the accident would have no difficulty in flying that of the plane 10.4 hours before had off of the runway at the yard before the end of the runway. Runway used was 90 degrees, because of its greater length.

It is, therefore, the opinion of this board that the above accident was caused by the sudden shift in wind.

APPENDIX B.

Blank.

Received by

MAY 22, 1944

[Stamp]