

into deeper water and was dragged under by a strong undertow and drowned. Falvo says he fell into chin high water and was dragged by the undertow towards land and finally grabbed onto a small bush and was able to crawl out of the river. Falvo was told later that Larry Rose died in hospital.

As for the rest of the crew, It was impossible to use the interphone as it became inoperable and the bailout bell used as an adjunct perhaps was not heard or was inoperable too. It was protected in two ways to prevent misuse by playful crew members. 1) Break away safety wire had to be broken before the red switch cover could be opened, 2) a coded sequence had to be entered before the bell would ring. The normal sounding of the bell was one long ring for bail out, the short rings was to indicate recall of the jump order, but often just the sounding of the bell was enough and many jumped.

Editor's Comments on B-24 Flight Characteristics:

In this circumstance with the cockpit on fire, the bell may have failed to ring which would account for the men in the tail not being alerted in time to jump safely. Those in the back of the ship did not bail out.

The four that did jump were all on the flight deck and jumped out of the open bomb bay doors. When a damaged bomber is falling out of formation or is in a spin, centrifugal forces pins down crew members so they can't escape. It is essential that bailout proceed immediately before the aircraft dives or, falls into a spin. Crew members probably had less than a second or two to jump safely, hence no time to fasten leg straps.

Hardin reported too that he could see clearly the white flashes of the fighters' guns as he closed in.

It's likely that the nose gunner and bombardier may have been already dead from the fighters head on attack. This is pure speculation because a nose gunner if attacked from the front while in his turret is protected by bullet proof glass and armor plate if facing straight ahead. The irony is that both pilots had no protection except from the rear, and protecting the gunner only made little sense. The instruction manuals showed armor plate installations in B-24s was for protection from attacks from the rear of the aircraft. (See diagram, Page 17.) However, this is true only for aircraft arriving from the states. Airplanes sent down from England when one of the 8th Air Force's Air Divisions converted from B-24s to B-17s, resulting in a temporary surplus of B-24s in England. These aircraft had gone through a modification center where bullet proof glass was installed over all of the cockpit windows, armor plate added to the fuselage sides just below each pilot's sliding window. More armor plate was added inside also just in front of the instrument panel.

Another irony is that most crews disliked the armored B-24s as they were heavier than the conventional ships making them more difficult to manoeuver while in formation and burned more fuel which was already marginal on a mission longer than 6 hours. As an example, to maintain position in a formation when the throttles were pulled back to avoid a collision, the aircraft would sail forward at a faster clip. So here was an aircraft with more armor protection that could help save casualties, because a fully loaded conventional B-24 at 22,000 feet was flying just above the stall envelope under ideal conditions.

With the prototype XB-24 aircraft weighing about 32,000 pounds and operational design weights for B-24Ds of about 52,000

pounds, and real combat weights up to 72,000 pounds, the overloaded combat B-24s needed skilled pilots to keep them flying. The average pilot coming into heavy bomber groups averaged between 250 and 350 hours of flying time. Another caveat was that no two planes were alike in many aspects, such as fuel burn out, control differences, and so on. Ships following in the formation always burned more fuel than lead ships because of constant maneuvering to stay in formation.

The repair of battle damage added weight to older aircraft in the fleet, some were bent because of violent flight to avoid fighter aircraft or imminent collision. Thus it was desirable to assign a flight crew to one aircraft so that they could be made familiar with the individual aircraft's peculiarities. But this was only possible if the crew's aircraft was serviceable. Battle damage from flak bursts occurred quite often. Maintenance crews were hard pressed to make repairs overnight with the primitive tools at their disposal. The pilots had to become familiar with all of the aircraft within their squadrons and they talked to one another. Certain aircraft acquired bad reputations, and no one wanted to fly in these aircraft, crews often thought they were being discriminated against when assigned to them. There was yet another bit of irony, some old clunkers survived the war and returned to the states after the conclusion of hostilities. Crews would volunteer for old clunker aircraft if indeed they could, because they were considered lucky. New aircraft were seemingly shot down on their first few missions resulting in the fact that new airplanes had to prove themselves to the crews, before trust between crew and airplane could be established.

For the uninitiated, a combat crew needed a relationship with their aircraft, because the aircraft came alive when it was touched. You wore it like a shirt or coat and the human and the machine became intimate. If the aircraft was treated right such as making gentle turns when possible and not exceeding recommended power settings so that the rate of engine failure would be reduced, reliability went up. The same relationship exists between a driver and his own automobile, take good care of it, and it responds by being there for you when you need it. But in war when your aircraft is wounded by enemy action, combat crews will do anything in their power to ease the pain of the aircraft by throwing, guns, ammo, turrets, radios overboard. To lighten the load to keep the ship alive, because if it dies, so does the crew. If it's true that man makes mechanical things in his own image, sick cars begin to run hot, taking on a temperature just like a sick person. In fact, the aircraft was as fragile as the crew. In truth, the randomness of war was difficult to understand, why would one airplane be shot down and another fly through a carpet of flak and survive? A good crew that was cross trained to perform the duties of one another could survive some situations, but a direct hit in the bomb bay left little chance of survival of man or plane, this was the great worry of all combat airmen. The other greatest worry was why didn't the flak gunner ever run out of shells?

Some aircraft were equipped with pilots' seats made from armor plate to accommodate the pilot's parachute pack. These were called coffin seats because you sank down into it. The protection was from the sides, below and behind the pilot. For frontal protection flak vests would have to be draped on the pilots lap impairing precise movement of the control wheel.

The B-24 was not equipped with power boost depending solely on booster tabs to help move the flight surfaces. The ideal B-24 pilot was a beefy football player, preferably a lineman.