

The Rise and Fall of a Liberator

The following story is reprinted from the Liberator Club's publication "Briefing", Fall 1980 Edition.

Long-awaited attempts to raise a B-24 bomber from the 150-foot frigid depths of Hunting Lake in the High Sierras of Central California have been aborted, as they say in Liberator language.

Fresno rock concert promoter Gene Forte's underfinanced salvage mission took an ignominious beating - leaving Liberator wreckage strewn over the lake floor and a lawsuit filed to recover those portions removed during the ill-fated operation. And this modern-day Midas had everything he touched turn to red ink.

The 28 year old promoter "expected to spend \$100,000" in the salvage attempt which he hoped to recoup by setting up a "Liberator Historical Faire," charging spectators \$1.50 each for admission.

The promoter's lawyer acknowledged "poor planning" on the part of both Forte and the salvage company - noting there were no pre-arranged terms or methods of payment. The salvage firm held the B-24's wing, two engines and propellers, rear gun turret and several smaller pieces while demanding \$10,000 cash and \$40,000 in guaranteed pledges. (Four commercial divers at \$1,000 per day - were at Huntington Lake for over a week.)

Lawyer Van Rozeboom claimed they could have finished the job in another day and retrieved the other half of the scattered wreckage. Because of costs involved, some observers have suggested that the remainder including bodies of crewmen reported to be in the tail section of the plane - might never be recovered.

The bomber (from the 461st BG) crashed into Huntington Lake Dec. 6, 1943 on a flight from Fresno's Hammer Field. The Lib had smashed through the ice-covered lake during a crash landing at night and sunk out of sight with six crewmen entombed until bodies were removed in 1955 when the wreck was finally discovered. Two survivors had mysteriously bailed out while the others remained aboard to ride the bomber to their deaths.

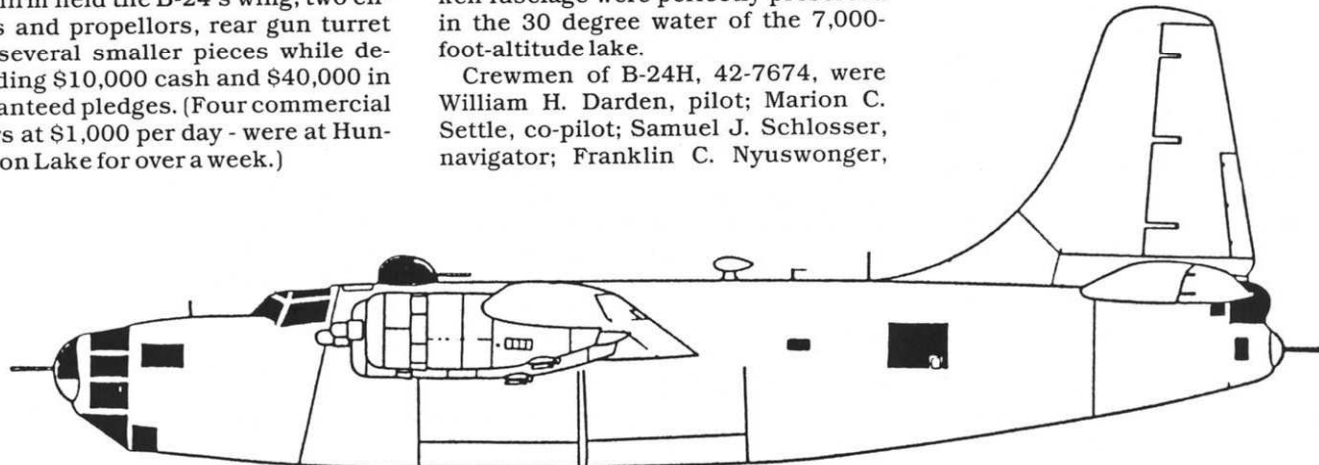
In 1955, Southern California Edison Co. drained the lake down to 93 feet in order to repair cracks in the dam. As waters receded the twin tails of the Liberator became visible and then the wing and engines appeared.

Bodies of crewmen found in the broken fuselage were perfectly preserved in the 30 degree water of the 7,000-foot-altitude lake.

Crewmen of B-24H, 42-7674, were William H. Darden, pilot; Marion C. Settle, co-pilot; Samuel J. Schlosser, navigator; Franklin C. Nyuswonger,



engineer; George J. Barulic, radio operator; Richard Spangler; Donald V. Vander Plasch and Richard E. Mayo, gunners. Settle and Barulic bailed out and survived.



PRESENTING THE B-24N

The new B-24N will soon be in operation in many bases in the continental United States. It incorporates a number of changes and new features developed as a result of the airplane's extensive combat experience.

The major difference in the exterior appearance of the B-24N is the single vertical stabilizer. Also, the new nose turret installation is ball type. This change has cleaned up the nose and greatly increased the pilot's forward visibility.

The most important change in the inside, as far as the pilot is concerned, is the relocation of many of the switches. Also, some of the instruments and other equipment have been moved.

The general flight characteristics of the B-24N are basically the same as

those of other series, and stalling speeds are the same. The principal difference is that in earlier B-24 airplanes the rudder does not give enough directional control at low airspeeds (around 130 mph) with an outboard engine not working. In the B-24N, however, rudder control is good enough to maintain straight flight with no yaw under these conditions. You can cruise with two engines out on one side at airspeeds of 150 to 155 mph and trim the airplane to fly "hands off." This condition has been tested, with No. 1 and No. 2 feathered and No. 3 and No. 4 pulling nearly rated power.

The control pressures have been improved making it much easier to hold the airplane under unbalanced power conditions. The rudder pressures are

now considerably lighter, and aileron and elevator pressures have been lightened to a point where they are very satisfactory.

The B-24N is powered with four Pratt-Whitney, Model R-1830-75 engines, which allow more horsepower for takeoff.

The takeoff, or turbo bypass, valve has been added to the engines on the B-24N. The operation of this valve will require some study by the pilot before he becomes proficient in its use.

Generally speaking, the B-24N is much more of a pilot's airplane and the average pilot will find much less difficulty when flying under unbalanced power conditions.

*Editors Note: Where was this Plane when we needed it?