

Runner" were returning after dropping practice bombs\* on a small island of Pianosa about 100 miles Northeast of the spur of the Italian boot in the Aegean Sea.

According to Forrest Nance, Abbey's B-24 had asked for permission to fly closer to Ship 15 "Ramp Rooster" flown by Forrest Nance so that inflight photos could be taken. Nance was leading a six plane formation that day. Abbey's plane approached from its right side bringing it parallel with the left side of Nance's aircraft. The two ships collided, Abbey's plane losing about 12 feet of the right wing. Because the command pilot on a B-24 sits in the left seat (facing forward) a close in approach from the right would be awkward, because the pilot would have to look over his right shoulder and over the co-pilot through the opposite window. From later discussion on the ground, Nance accused Abbey of sloppy flying and continued to tease him from time to time so it has to be assumed that Abbey was flying at the time of the incident and not the co-pilot. After the war when Bill Abbey was sick, probably at the time when Abbey was suffering from the onset of cancer, Nance went to visit him and apologized for all the ribbing. Abbey died sometime after the visit. Bill Abbey is pictured standing on top of the wing in the photo of "Rum Runner." The man looking up from the ground is the squadron intelligence officer Bert Lange.

On impact the three crew members, 1st/Lt Myron Manhart-Navigator, 2nd/Lt Sheldon M Rutter-Bombardier, and S/Sgt Bernard R Schneider-Nose Gunner, in the nose of the aircraft bailed out quickly through the nose wheel door after seeing parts of Abbey's plane being swept away. There is some thought that the bail out bell may have sounded. The rest of the crew were pinned down as the aircraft went into a flat spin shortly after impact and could not bail out.

By adding full throttle on number three and four engines and pulling power from one and two engines, Lt Abbey was able to break out of the spin and fly very carefully back to the airfield at Torretta Italy (vicinity Cerignola) and was able to make a difficult landing using full aileron for lateral control. Nance's aircraft sustained damage to No 1 engine's oil line causing the crew to feather the engine. They were able to fly back to base safely.

Meanwhile Sgt Schneider fell deep into the water and was trapped under his parachute, using a pocket knife he was able to cut a hole in his parachute and swim through it. His life vest inflated immediately and he opened the sea marker cartridge. The bright yellow dye was visible from the air and another B-24 (possibly Nance's aircraft) spotted three crew members in the water and flew in a circular pattern around the downed men at low altitude and possibly dropping several extra Mae West life jackets.

One source quotes that several Me 109's may have flown over to investigate, and saw what was going on, but did not attack and flew off. The ME-109s were normally based at Udine, in Northern Italy. The circling B-24 was able to direct a RCAF Sea Walrus to the general area. The three crewmen were spread wide apart. Lt Manhart reported to be an accomplished swimmer was trying to swim back to Italy. The circling B-24 directed the Walrus to taxi to each man where rescue was effected by the use of a life preserver so the men could climb aboard.

By this time the sea became too rough to take off so the plane had to taxi to smother water and after three attempts to break free of the ocean surface it finally took off and brought the crew back to Italy where the men were put up at a British Field Hospital at San Servo. The men by now were quite sick due to swallowing a lot of sea water. They were put up in a malaria ward that was full of suffering British

soldiers. They were picked up the next day by Maj. Fairbanks of the 824 squadron and driven back to the airfield in a staff car. Bail out took place during daylight hours probably around noontime.

Lt Rutter was not a regular member of the crew, he had replaced the assigned bombardier Leonard Jorgenson who was left back in the States because of illness. On this day Lt Rutter was not wearing a life vest and may have had to swim to the Walrus if he was unable to find one of the dropped life vests before being rescued.

I pieced this story from several sources including phone interviews with Lt Nance and Sgt Schneider, and Edwin Turner, the crew chief of "Rum Runner" so the events may not be historically correct in fine detail, but the incident did happen basically as I have described.

T/Sgt John L Hahn the flight engineer who landed with the aircraft was not wearing a parachute harness on this day either. He would have gone down with the plane if it ditched in the ocean.

The crew flying that day were:

In Ship #21 "Rum Runner" 42-52660

|        |                        |                |              |
|--------|------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1st/Lt | William A Abbey Jr (D) | Pilot          | ASN 0808259  |
| 1st/Lt | Walter G Price         | Co-pilot       | ASN 0814547  |
| 1st/Lt | Myron A Manhart* (D)   | Navigator      | ASN 0704606  |
| 2nd/Lt | Sheldon M Rutter*      | Bombardier.    | ASN 0752644  |
| T/Sgt  | John L Hahn            | Engineer       | ASN 16132156 |
| T/Sgt  | David H Wolfe Jr       | Radio Operator | ASN 12041457 |
| S/Sgt  | Bernard R Schneider*   | Nose Gunner    | ASN 37288756 |
| S/Sgt  | Albert K Borcharding   | Ball Gunner    | ASN 36718980 |
| Sgt    | Scott W Larson         | Tail Gunner    | ASN 13059636 |
| S/Sgt  | Joseph E Pemental      | Upper Gunner   | ASN 31137521 |

\*= Bailed out

In ship #15 "Ramp Rooster" 42-52576

|        |                     |                |              |
|--------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Capt   | E Forrest Nance     | Pilot          | ASN 0429844  |
| 1st/Lt | Layton W McDonald   | Co-pilot       | ASN 0814513  |
| 1st/Lt | Jack Gittleman      | Navigator      | ASN 7073981  |
| 1st/Lt | Reinhold Rickert    | Bombardier     | ASN 0697318  |
| T/Sgt  | Andrew J Beard      | Engineer       | ASN 38367769 |
| T/Sgt  | Robert J Dixon      | Radio Operator | ASN 18071678 |
| S/Sgt  | John P Hensel       | Nose Gunner    | ASN 16075830 |
| S/Sgt  | Eugene LaPierre (D) | Upper Gunner   | ASN 16079605 |
| S/Sgt  | Melvin I Albert     | Tail Gunner    | ASN 13981890 |

Because of the narrow confines of the B-24 crew members were usually dressed with a parachute harness that a chest pack chute could be snapped in place quickly. Some pilots preferred seat packs over the chest pack. The chest pack was usually left on the floor near the crew members work station. On some occasions the chest packs were moved because of the necessity of defending the aircraft from fighter attack, so if a bail out was ordered, there was a mad scramble for whatever chute was handy. I haven't been able to determine if the life vests were worn over or under the parachute harness. Crew members such as the flight engineer having to transit the bomb bay from one end of the ship to another would tear a Mae West rendering it useless if worn. Some crews were religious in wearing survival gear, others preferred the freedom of movement and stored their gear as required.

Lt Manhart is deceased, and Lt Rutter last lived in Washington DC.