

INVESTIGATION OF “JEANIE”
Material Provided by John S. Warner, 379th BG

Williams, Donald E., F/O, and other Crew Members MIA 6 January 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR THE OFFICER IN CHARGE:

The following information regarding F/O DONALD E. WILLIAMS and other crew members missing in action on 6 January 1945 was obtained on 11 November 1945 from Mr. Rheinholdt Strecker, 327 NE Morris St., Portland, Oregon, formerly Staff Sergeant, ASN 39334016, AC.

1. Name and Rank Casualties:

WILLIAMS, Donald E., F/O, T128817, navigator.

HILLMAN, 2nd Lt., first name unknown, bombardier.

TURNER, T/Sgt., first name unknown, engineer.

SMITH, 1st Lt., first name unknown, co-pilot.

2. Unit:

91st Bomb Group, 323rd Bomb Squadron

3. Date last seen:

6 January 1945.

4. Place last seen:

Three or four minutes out of Cologne, Germany on return trip to England, after bombs had been dropped.

5. Circumstances of loss of aircraft:

Aircraft was the lead ship in the formation, carried ten men. #3 and #4 engines were knocked out by flak; the aircraft caught fire and was burning furiously.

6. RE: WILLIAMS and HILLMAN

Informant had no positive information to offer concerning the fate of these men. Informant stated he had left his position as waist gunner when his oxygen mask was cut up by flak and had gone forward to the radio operator's compartment and found the ship burning furiously, he bailed out. At that time the ship was losing altitude rapidly but was not out of control. Strecker did not know whether other members of the crew had left the ship before him or which and how many of the crew remained in the ship after he jumped. He did not recall seeing any members of the crew remained in the ship after he jumped. He did not recall seeing any member of the crew while he was working his way forward to the radio compartment.

Strecker stated that while riding down on his parachute he looked upward and saw one parachute approximately two-thirds collapsed. Nobody was riding this parachute down, and the parachute apparently was collapsing because of the absence of anyone being attached to it, and stated he saw no other parachute in the air. Nor, after jumping did he see the aircraft again.

Informant stated that after the crew had been assembled in a prison camp, the remaining members of the crew had no knowledge or theory on what had become of WILLIAMS and HILLMAN.

7. RE: SMITH

1st Lt. McConnell, pilot of the aircraft, told Strecker that he had helped SMITH out of the aircraft. On or about the 7th of January 1945, a German soldier came to the prison camp where McConnell was imprisoned and stated that an American flying officer had died in a nearby hospital. From the description given by the German soldier, McConnell believed it was SMITH who had died in the hospital.

1. RE: TURNER

Turner, Strecker said, went down with the ship. A German soldier took F/O Birkness, GH Operator, to the scene of the crash of the aircraft where Birkness identified the only body found in the ship as that of TURNER.

D. W. PENNAK, Spl Agt, CIC 4Af

DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDER 12356, SECTION 3.3, 785072

By FWP/DMC MARS, Date 12-12-83.

WAR DEPARTMENT

11568 HEADQUARTERS ARMY AIR FORCES

WASHINGTON

MISSING AIR CREW REPORT

1. ORGANIZATION: Location AAF Station No. 121 Air Force Eighth Air Force

Group 91st Bombardment Group (H) Squadron 323rd Bombardment Squadron.

2. SPECIFY: Place of Departure AAF Station 121 Course Route to Koln, Germany.

Target Koln, Germany. Type of Mission Bombardment

3. WEATHER CONDITIONS AND VISIBILITY AT THE CRASH OR WHEN LAST REPORTED:
10/10 Undercast, top at 15,000 feet. Visiblity unlimited aloft.

4. Give: (a) Day 6 Month January Year 1945 Location 49:35N-06:30 E. of last known whereabouts of missing A/C.

(b) Specify whether aircraft was last sighted (x); Last contacted by radio (); Forced down (); Seen to crash (); Information not Available ()

5. AIRCRAFT WAS LOST, OR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN LOST, AS A RESULT OF (Check only one) Enemy Aircraft (); Enemy Anti-Aircraft (X); Other circumstances as follows: _____

6. AIRCRAFT: Type, Model, Series B-17-G AAF Serial No. 44-8501 (Asgd to 379th BG).

7. NICKNAME OF AIRCRAFT, If any: "Jeanie"

8. ENGINES: Type, Model, Series R-1820-97 AAF Serial No.

(a)SW-021808 (b)SW-021793 (c)SW-025133 (d)SW-028257

9. Installed Weapons:	<u>Make</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Serial No.</u>
(a)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307896
(b)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307999
(c)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1308239
(d)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1308040
(e)	Frigidaire Division	.50 cal A/C mach gun	414530
(f)	Frigidaire Division	.50 cal A/C mach gun	414841
(g)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307720
(h)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307745
(i)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307688
(j)	Buffalo Arms Co.	.50 cal A/C mach gun	1307683
(k)			
(l)			
(m)			
(n)			
(o)			
(p)			

10. THE PERSONS LISTED BELOW WERE REPORTED AS

- (a) Battle Casualty X
(b) Non-Battle Casualty

14. ATTACH AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, MAP, CHART, OR SKETCH, SHOWING APPROXIMATE LOCATION WHERE AIRCRAFT WAS LAST SEEN OR HEARD FROM.

15. ATTACH EYEWITNESS DESCRIPTION OF CRASH, FORCED LANDING, OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES PERTAINING TO MISSING AIRCRAFT.

16. GIVE NAME, RANK AND SERIAL NUMBER OF OFFICER IN CHARGE OF SEARCH, IF ANY, INCLUDING DESCRIPTION AND EXTENT No search

Date of Report 17 January 1945

(Signature of Preparing Officer)
RICHARD F. COLIP, Stat'l Officer.

17. REMARKS OR EYEWITNESS STATEMENTS: 1ST LT., A. C.,

At approximately 10 minutes after bombs away, altitude 24,500 to 25,000 feet, I observed aircraft B-17-G 44-8501 flying on our right wing position with number 3-engine smoking. At this time no fire was visible. I also noticed that the guns of the ball-turret were pointed downward and the turret was not moving. Apparently the crew were preparing to bail out. Approximately 2 minutes later the tail gunner of our crew reported that subject aircraft was on fire. I then noticed that the ship had lost from 3,000 to 4,000 feet altitude and had slipped behind the formation. The number 3 engine was burning and flames were trailing halfway back to the main entrance door. At this time I saw one man leave the tail position. As his parachute opened almost immediately. Shortly afterward three more men bailed out of either the nose hatch or the bomb bay, all three parachuted opening immediately. At this time the aircraft took a steep bank and started into a dive of approximately 60°. Just after it started into the dive two men bailed out of the nose and their parachutes also opened. The aircraft then disappeared into the clouds. The aircraft was under control for about 2 minutes after the first man bailed out and it is believed possible that the tenth crewmember could have made a delayed jump. I observed a total of nine men leave the aircraft all of their parachutes opened.

/s/ Edgar L. Harrell

/t/ Edgar L. Harrell, Sgt., 36901826, 401st Bomb Sq. 91st BG

At the time that three crewmembers bailed out of the waist door I observed another crew member leave the aircraft. He made a delayed jump, and after dropping approximately 5,000 feet, entered the clouds. He did not open his parachute. From our position above the aircraft B-17-G 44-8501 I was too far away to see if he was wearing a parachute. I believed it was a gasoline fire in the as it seemed to be going out at the time that the aircraft went into its dive.

277. 418. 5-1-45 Koblenz Marshalling yards.

(50 21N—07 35E) Completed

Mission Summary: Poor Visibility made assembly difficult. Primary was the Communications Center at Mechernich. PFF bombing of the secondary with unobserved results. Flak was meager, and no e/a opposition.

Group Leaders: Lead-Major Klette, 324th Sqd, a/c 44-8174. (12 a/c)

Low-1/Lt Goodrich, 322nd Sqd, a/c 42-97630.(12 a/c)

High-Captain Good, 401st Sqd, a/c 44-8357. (13 a/c)

A/C aborts: Lead-1/Lt Laws, 324th Sqd, a/c 43-37993. (NS)

High-1/Lt Ziegler, 401st Sqd, a/c 44-32116 (NS) 1/Lt Holmes, 401st Sqd, a/c 44-8324. (NS)

No losses.

278 419 6-1-45 Cologne Marshalling yards.

(50 58N—06 55E) Completed

Mission Summary: Primary was the Duetz Road suspension bridge over the Rhine River at Cologne. Secondary was bombed by PFF methods with unobserved results. Flak was meager, and no e/a opposition.

Group Leaders: Lead-Captain Reid, 323rd Sqd, a/c 44-8174. (12 a/c)

Low-Captain Good, 401st Sqd, a/c 42-97754. (12 a/c)

High-1/Lt Manville, 324th Sqd, a/c 42-97632.(12a/c)

A/C aborts: Lead-1/Lt Flynn, 323rd Sqd, a/c 42-97276. (NS)

Losses: 1 B-17 MIA: 1/Lt McConnell & Crew, 323rd Sqd.

279 420 10-1-45 Cologne/Ostheim A/F. Completed

(5- 57N—07 40F)

Mission Summary: GH bombing, strike photos shoe excellent results. Flak was moderate and accurate. Good Mustang escort, covered both routed and topcover over target.

Group Leaders: 1st "C" Lead Captain-Newquist,322nd,a/c 4297630(12)

1st "C" Low-1/Lt Gaines, 324th,a/c 4481745(12 a/c)

1st "C" High-Captain Donohue, 323rd,a/c 42-97754(13)

1st "B" High-Captain Westwood,401st,a/c 4297754(13)

A/C aborts: 1st "C" High-2/Lt Brown, 323rd Sqd, a/c 43-38379. (NS)

1/Lt Sweet, 323rd Sqd, a/c 42-32116. (NS)

1st "B" High-1/Lt Hiroy, 401st Sqd, a/c 42-38144. (NS)

1/Lt Gertsen, 401st Sqd, a/c 42-38144.(NS)

1/Lt Ziegler, 401st Sqd, a/c 42-37540.(NS)

No losses.

Note: A 91st B-17 crash landing at Brussels/Evere A/F, hit a hanger. Crew killed.

TGRS/ TSFET

Form No. 10

27-8-45

REPORT OF INVESTIGATION-AREA SEARCHING

To be completely filled out and attached to each copy of GR form I, "Report of Burial" when disinterment is accomplished.

1. Was investigation preceded by Advance Publicity: Yes

(If Special Investigation, so indicate) _____

2. SMITH, WARREN T. 1ST Lt. 0-70 A.A.F.

(Full name of deceased) (Rank) (ASN) (Organization)

3. State: Means of Identification, i.e. identification, tags attached to marker, inscription on grave marker, cemetery record, town hall records, etc. and Source of Information, identification tags, identification cards, identification bracelet, leather name plate on flying jacket, clothing marks etc.

1-ID Tag found on Body

German R.B. Card No. 9520

1-1st Lt. Bar found on body. (See reverse No. 14)

4. Give exact location of isolated grave, furnishing coordinates and letter prefix, map sheet, scale and series used ; also name of nearest town: Wetteldorf, Ger.(WL-1973)

NOTE: ATTACH OVERLAY SHOWING EXACT LOCATION OF ISOLATED GRAVE, TYING LOCATION IN WITH PERMANENT LANDMARKS.

5. Full name of cemetery (include plot, row and grave if organized cemetery):

Wetteldorf, Cemetery-Allied Plot Grave No.6

6. Approximate or established date of death (state which and give basis for date selected):

7 Jan. 1945 German R.B. Card No. 9520

7. Approximate or established date of burial (give basis for date established)

7 Jan 1945 German R.B Card No.9520

8. Manner in which grave was marked, show information contained on the marker:

Wooden Cross (No Information)

9. List personal effects found in possession of civilian and custodial personnel now retaining, furnishing name and address of individuals concerned:

NONE

10. Furnish information obtained concerning place, and particulars surrounding death and burial; give the names and addresses of all persons furnishing such information (contact local Mayor, priest, police, hospitals, cemetery sextons or caretakers, those responsible for burial and others possessing important information): Died in German Military hospital at Sohoneaken(WL-0974) Buried by German Soldiers in Wetteldorf. Information concerning place of death and time of death obtain from German RB Cord Number 9520

Place of burial supplied by Burgermeister of Werreldorf

Johann Lechter.

11. Give name and address of person who can guide disinterring team to burial location:

12. Is this atrocity case No Is there evidence that it may be: No

If the answer is yes, that responsible War Crimes representative been notified: _____

13. Names and addresses of persons committing the atrocity or the military unit of which these persons were members

(Not Applicable) _____

14. If unidentified and a crewmember of a plane or vehicle, indicate names of any other known crewmembers and state whether buried at this location or a survivor:

Body was further identified by clothing found in body also one pilots
insignia _____

It is possible to find further information concerning crew members and type of plane that said
deceased came from. _____

15. If unidentified, supply any of the following information determinable:

a. Crew position in plane or vehicle: _____

b. Plane or vehicle serial number: _____ Type: _____

c. Installed weapons:

Serial Number	Calibre & Mfgr.	Serial Number	Calibre & Mfgr.
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

d. Engine serial number: _____ Type: _____

Signature of Investigating Officer

WILLIAM H. BARNETT

2ND Lt. Inf. D-2018275

6890 Q.M.G.R.Co.

Disinterment approved by, (HQ Authorizing Exhumation): _____

Disinterment and *reburial/burial made by: _____

Date if *burial/reburial: 8 February 1946

Place of *burial/reburial U.S. Military Cemetery: St. Avold, France

Plot YYY Row 10 Grave 113

Note: Additional particulars regarding investigation:

Will be placed on additional sheet.

*cross out word if not applicable

6/98-13

8th AIR FORCE

1ST BOMBARDMENT DIVISION

1st COMBAT BOMBARDMENT WING (H)

91ST BOMBARDMENT GROUP (H)

Period covered from 1 January, 1945 to 31 January, 1945

Prepared by:

ROBERT F. CREGO, Capt., Air Corps.

278 Cologne, Germany 6. Jan. 1945 Deutz Bridge over Rhine

1. A/C Airborne: 37 (includes GH ship from Kimbolton)

2. A/C Dispatched: 36

3. A/C Attacking: 36

4. Bombs on target: 202 X 1000 at 1140 from 25,000 ft.

5. A/C Lost: One (AA)

6. Claims: None

7. Personnel Casualties: 9 Missing & 1 from 379

8. Battle Damage: 8 minor 1 major.

Remarks: Bombing was done in squadron formation by PFF methods. Mickey operator's report excellent runs with equipment working properly. Results unobserved. Gee-fixes taken at bombs away indicate that results will be good. Fighter support was described as good especially in the target area. Our A/C 880, pilot Lt. Balaban of 328th squadron landed at Merville, France with Battle damage-crew Ok. A/C 501, furnished by the 379th group was seen to hit the ground at approximately 5012N 0608E after going down with #3 engine on fire, 7 to 9 chutes reported.

GROUP 91ST DATE 6 Jan, 1945 COMBAT CREWS MISSING A/C No. 501-379 Bomb Gp A/C IN
SQUADRON 323RD PLACE Colonge, Germany ACTION CIRCUMSTANCES Lost in A/A fire

NAME RANK POSITION HOME ADDRESS

McConnell, Cecil G. 1/Lt. Pilot Cozad, Nebraska

Smith, Warren T. 1/Lt. Co-Pilot 402 Clark St., Rapid City, S. Dakota

Williams, Donald E. F/O Navigator 712 Washington St., Waukegan, Illinois.

Hillman, Alan G. 2/Lt. Bombardier 40-12 221 St., Bayside, New York

Turner, George G. T/Sgt. Top Turret 140 Railroad Ave., Hinton, West Virginia

Strecker, Rheinholdt (NMI) S/Sgt. Waist Gun 5806 N. William Ave., Portland, Oregon

Merritt, George F. T/Sgt. Radio Gun 5846-43rd Ave., Woodside, L.I. N.Y

Nichols, Alfas E. S/Sgt. Ball Turret 227 N. La Ave., Magnum, Oklahoma

Hoffman, Marion C. S/Sgt. Tail Gun Rt. #2, Otewel, Indiana

Burtness, Donald C. F/O G.H. Operator – Not Available

* - From 379th Bomb Gp. (H)

REMARKS: Our A/C experienced meager, accurate, tracking A/A fire. A/C #501 received direct hit of flak in

Right wing which caused it to burst into flame. Aircraft then went into a slow, flat spin and then crashed at approximately coordinates of 4935N-0630E. When subject A/C first started losing altitude, tail gunner came out of tail, three came out of waist and three came of nose. Six to eight parachutes were seen to open.

1st Lt. Warren T. Smith

Missing in Action 6 Jan 1945

On 6 Jan 1945 at approximately 12:30 am our B-17G aircraft received nearly a direct anti-aircraft shell hit, after bombing Cologne, Germany.

Lt. Smith and I were stunned for a second for, the explosion. I recovered first and Lt. Smith was just coming to and still more groggy than I. He seemed to be motioning downwards with his hands and I was unable to contact him over the interphone on to get a word out of him by yelling across at him. I believe he was hurt but I could see no visible sign that he was injured.

By the time the aircraft was on five and I had given the crew the order to abandon ship. The men in the nose were bailing out the nose escape hatch and Lt. Smith and I were endeavoring to get out of our seat. I got out first, stepped down and back between the two pilot's seats.

I reached up and switched on the automatic pilot, hoping it would keep the ship level long enough to enable the men from the radio room on back to realize we were on fire and in trouble, in the event they had not heard my order to abandon ship, and to allow them to clear the aircraft safely. It was impossible for me to get through the flame and check on each man, as I should have done if at all possible. After switching on the automatic pilot I looked up to see Lt. Smith collapse in his seat. He fell forward and I reached up grabbing him under each arm and pulled him out of his seat. He immediately recovered and bailed out the nose escape hatch headfirst and I followed him out likewise. I was the last man out of the nose.

Two months later I met four of my enlisted men in the prisoner of war camp at Nienburg, Germany, among them S/Sgt. Rheinholdt Strecker. The German had told him one of the pilot had died, that he was a blonde and from Nebraska. However, Lt. Smith was from South Dakota and I would not call him a blonde. That is the only information I have concerning his fate. I judge our position when approximately sixty miles straight south of Cologne, Germany and from ten to twenty miles behind the

Western front.

I was burned so badly on my face and wrist that I received hospital care from the Germans for seven weeks. I know Lt. Smith was burned much worse than I was, and I believe he was injured by flak.

Pilot - Cecil G. McConnell 0-760975

1st Lt. Air Corps

Terminal leave effective 19 Sept 1945

Inactive status effective 10 Nov 1945

Flight Officer Donald C. Williams, T128817

Missing in Action 6 Jan 1945

I was the pilot of a B-17G aircraft on which Flight Officer Donald C. Williams, T128817, was the navigator on 6 Jan 1945.

We were flying the deputy lead position of our aircraft received nearly a direct anti-aircraft shell lift. The shell exploded to the right of the fuselage and slightly behind the right wing. The co-pilot, 1st Lt. Warren T. Smith and I were stunned for a second from the explosion. I quickly came to, still groggy and realized our no's 3 and 4 engines had been knocked out and the hydraulic system damaged. We were losing air speed and altitude and falling behind the bomber formation. I was fighting to keep the aircraft under control and working with no 3 and 4 engine. At this time a voice over the interphone from someone in the nose said, "We're on fire", just as flames burst forth into the cockpit. The entire inside of the fuselage from nose to radio room was a blazing mass of flames. I immediately gave the new the order was finished the nose escape hatch release was pulled and the three men in the nose were bailing out.

When I left the ship no one was in the aircraft from the front of the bomb bays forward. I heard no conversation on the interphone, which would lead me to believe any crew member was injured. Flight Officer Williams was the first, or among the first, three men to bail out. I would approximate our position when he jumped at fifty-six or fifty-seven miles south of Cologne, Germany, ten to twenty miles behind the Western front, and altitude 24,500 feet and air speed 135-140 miles per hour.

DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDR 12356, Section 3.3, 785072

By FWP/DMC MARS, DATE 12-12-83.

While I was a prisoner of was in Germany I heard of no information concerning Flight Officer Williams, either from American or German sources.

From my experiences while a prisoner of was and from stores heard from other allied prisoners, I am of the opinion Flight Officer Williams was billed of Germans upon landing- probably by civilians.

Pilot- Cecil G. McConnell 0-760975

1st Lt. Air Corps

Terminal leave effective 19 Sept. 1945

Inactive statue effective 10 Nov 1945

DECLASSIFIED PER EXECUTIVE ORDER12356, Section 3.3, 78072

By FWP/DMC MARS, DATE 12-12-83.

2nd Lt. Alan G. Hillman 0-771927

Missing in Action 6 Jan 1945

The enclosed information concerning Flight Officer Donald C. Williams, T128817, also covers all information which I have concerning 2nd Lt. Alan G. Hillman, 0-771927.

Pilot- Cecil G. McConnell 0-760975

1st Lt. Air Corps

Terminal leave effective 19 Sept 1945

Inactive Statue effective 10 Nov 1945

Washington D.C.

314 A. Lt. M.C.

Nov. 3, 1945

Commanding General

Army Air Forces,

Washington, D.C.

Major Wm. D. Sanders

Actg. Chief, Notification Section,

Personal affairs Branch

Personal Services Division

Dear Sir:

With reference to your letter of 19 Oct. 1945, through HQ. A. A. T. Officer Replacement Pool, 830 W. Broadway, Louisville 3, Kentucky and sent to my former home address Cozad, Nebraska.

Sir my present home is Washington D.C. and I regret the delay this has caused in answering your letter.

Enclosed is information concerning Flight Officer Donald C. Williams, T 12 8817, navigator on my crew 6 Jan 1945, and my other crewmember who are M & A.

If I may be of any further assistance, I will be more than glad to be interrogated by your office.

My terminal leave was effective 19 Sept 1945 and I revert to an inactive statue 10 Nov 1945.

Respectfully yours,

Cecil G. McConnell 0-760975

1st Lt. A.C.

Flight George G. Turner 15114068

Missing in Action 6 Jan 1945

There are two stories concerning this man, my own and the Germans. First my own.

T/Sgt. Turner was the engines and occupied the top turret gun position, which was directly behind both pilots, so I was unable to watch his movements when abandoning the ship. My honest opinion is that he was not injured and that he bailed out the nose escape hatch and he would have struck the ground about fifty-six to fifty-eight miles south of Cologne, Germany.

The Germans told my waist-gunner S/Sgt., R. Rheinholdt Strecker, "That T/Sgt. Turner went down with the ship." If this is true, this is the only possible explanation I have. T/Sgt. Turner when seeing the flames decided to go through the bomb bays and bail out the tail door rather than dive through the flames and go out the nose escape hatch. If he did this, he evidentially passed out from lack of oxygen, (our altitude approximately 25000feet-24,500 feet) or became tangled up in the bomb bays with his parachute harness. It is the only possible place he could have been. I was the last man out of the nose and the four crewmembers back of the bomb bays did not see him.

My experiences with Germans while a prisoner of was causes me to say there is a fifty-fifty chance their stories are true. I know of many incidents where stories were told similar to these safely to knock down captured crewmembers morale, with the hope they would talk and disclose military information.

Pilot- Cecil G. McConnell 0-760975

1st Lt. Air Corps.

Terminal leave effective 19 Sept 1945

Inactive status effective 10 Nov 1945

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