

THE 91st WHO WAS SHOT DOWN TWICE

German fighter pilots compiled an amazing number of victories because when they were shot down and not seriously injured they would be up in their fighters the next day. If injured they would be up as soon as they were placed back on flying status.

Eighth Air Force airmen who were shot down over enemy territory became POWs and as such they didn't fly again. If they evaded capture and returned to duty, they never flew again in the European Theater of operation to protect those who helped them evade. For, if they flew again and were shot down and successfully bailed out, the Gestapo would have loved to get their hands on such air man to find names and places used by the local underground. However there were still a few instances where American airmen were shot down and did return to duty assigned to a combat crew.

This writing is about an American airman, Rollin P. Ball, who was shot down and returned to duty to be shot down again.

The Excalibur crew, Rollin P. Ball and the Hamm mission.



Navigator, Rollin Ball

Lt. Alan Brill and his crew, which included navigator Rollin P. Ball, was assigned B-17 41-24464 which had been transferred from the 306th Bomb Squadron to the 91st Bomb Group's 324th Bomb Squadron. Lt. Brill and crew named their newly assigned B-17 "Excalibur" and took it on its first 91st Bomb Group mission of 26 February to Wilhelmshaven.

Nine days later they took Excalibur on the mission to bomb the marshaling yards in Hamm, Germany, which was in the heavily industrialized Ruhr Valley. This was to be the Eighth Air force's first attack on this heavily defended industrial section of Germany. The 91st Bomb Group found itself to be in a unique and extremely dangerous position. This is because the entire Eighth Air Force except the 91st Bomb Group had abandoned the primary target due to weather conditions and attacked

other targets or returned to their bases..

Major Paul Fishburn, the officer in command of the 91st Bomb Group formation had not heard the radio transmission recalling the Groups and found his way through the weather front. Now the 91st Bomb Group with it's sixteen Fortresses found itself fighting off the entire German Luftwaffe. The bomb strike on the Hamm marshalling yards was extremely effective. The Group's battle with the German fighters and an intense flak barrage was exemplary under the conditions. Losses of aircraft and crews were taken but they were far less than one would expect under the conditions. All the Fortresses received heavy damage and casualties were taken but only four 91st Bomb Group B-17s out of the sixteen attacking the target were Missing In Action that day.

The Group was awarded the coveted Presidential (Distigushed) Unit Citation for this mission, the first of two awarded to the 91st during the war.

All the previous was prologue. Now, The story of Rollin P. Ball. Shot down twice.

This article which appeared in newspapers shortly after the event, tells Rollins part in the event with quotations from those involved. It's an incredibly well written account.

"Seven Fortress Crewmen Saved After Craft Falls Into Water

By EDWARD D.BALL

A U. S ARMY BOMBER STATION SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND.

March 7. (AP) -

Seven crewmen on a crippled Flying Fortress which was forced down in the North Sea after Thursday's raid on Hamm. Germany, were picked up by a minesweeper after battling frigid. 40-foot waves for eight hours.

The group, now back at this base, said the entire crew got out of the bomber after it crashed into the water but that three of thier comrades drowned, The Fortress struck the water with such force it broke in two at the middle and sank in five seconds.

Those rescued were First Lieut. Robert F Brubaker of Clearwater, the bombardier; Second Lieut. Rollin P. Ball of Easton. Md.. the navagalar; Tech. Sgt, Edwin L. Barber of Memphis, Tenn, the tail gunner; Tech, Sgt. Leroy M. Wolfington of Claremore, Okla, the right waist-gunner; Tech. Sgt. William C. Dickson of Selma. Ark, the top turret gunner; Staff Sgt. Donald C. Wells of Lincoln Neb, the radioman; and Staff Sgt. James M. Bechtel (home town unlisted), the left waist-gunner.

"We kept our heads," said a spokesman for the group, "and I got out like a flash"

Although two of the seven were injured. they managed to pull themselves aboard small rubber life-rafts and survived the bitter cold of the mountainous seas.

The men said the Fortress sank so quickly they were unable to remove the planes two life-rafts and emergency radio, but fortunately these vital pieces of equipment floated to the surface soon alter the

plane went down.

Still wearing their heavy flying gear, the men thrashed about for half an hour before the rafts were inflated and by then they were so numbed and exhausted they barely managed to pull themselves onto the rafts.

The rafts were lashed together to prevent upsetting. Then a box-kite was sent up with an aerial for transmitting distress signals.

The crash occurred shortly before noon. Twice during the afternoon planes were sighted some distance away but failed to see their flare

Then they began paddling "towards England."

"I was the sickest I have ever been in my life," said Dickson. who had swallowed a lot of sea water. About 6 p. m., a Royal Air Force patrol plane sighted them. The RAF crew dropped food and water then wheeled away to guide the minesweeper to the rescue. It was dark when the ship came up and the men used flares to give their position.

"They sure had good soup on that ship," said Dickson. "We wise-cracked while bobbing about on those rafts:" Ball said. "No one talked about our predicament. The ways the boys talked you'd think we did this every day. The injured men were in pain, but they never complained."

The Fortress hit the water when three engines gull on the way home after a 77 minute battle with swarms of Nazi fighters over Hamm"



The nose art on Excalibur as copied by nose artists on the 324th hanger wall

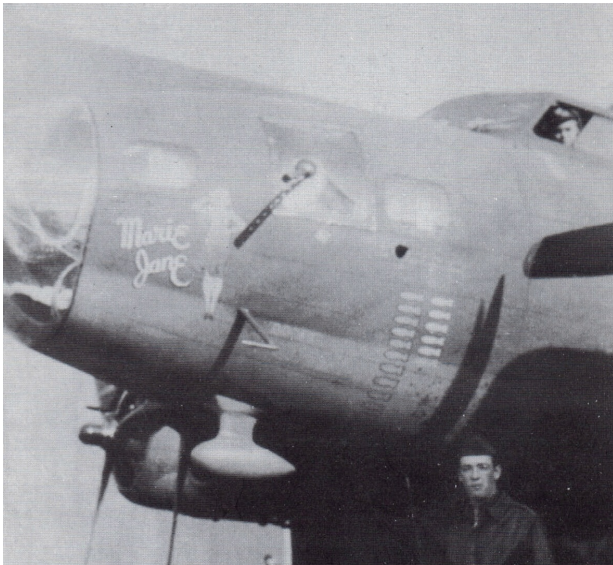


The officers of Excalibur, Navigator. Rollin Ball to the right

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Rollin Ball returns to Duty

As each of the surviving Brill crew members recovered, they were Returned To Duty. Since Rollin's first pilot, Lt. Alan Brill, had been Killed In Action, Rollin was assigned to the crew of Lt. Phillip Fischer. Lt Fischer's assigned B-17 was "Marie Jane" and it had been assigned to him in the States before the Group embarked for England. He had flown the first mission of the 91st Bomb Group when it first arrived in England. His tenth mission was the mission of 21 May, 1943, to bomb the U-boat pens at Wilhelmshaven. Fischer was flying his assigned B-17 and Rollin was flying as his navigator.



Marie Jane nose art



The Fischer crew. Rollin Ball, bottom Row,

Wilhelmshaven was on the coast of Germany and at the base of the Danish Peninsula. To reach the target from the 91st Bomb Group's base in England, the group would fly mainly over the North Sea on a North East flight path with a minimum amount of flying over Germany.

As the Marie Jane reached the target, the crew could see enemy aircraft in the area but standing off to the side. When they reached the Initial Point of the bomb run, the enemy fighters attacked head on with six to eight enemy fighter line abreast. The enemy sent up no flak but, instead, intended to scatter the Group with it's fighters before bombs away. Rollin was again in a vicious air battle. Two 324th B-17 and one 323rd B-17 were shot down on the Bomb run and crashed into Germany while Rollin and the crew of Marie Jane in spite of severe battle damage started across the English channel to try to reach England.

Rollin had been here before and survived a ditching. What thoughts must have raced though his mind as he tempted King Neptune and the North Sea for a second time. What stories would latter be told? Did they survive a good ditching and deploy their life rafts? If they deployed the rafts did they wise crack and avoid talking about the situation in which they found themselves?

What happened will never be known for this time Neptune and the North Sea exacted their toll. Neither Rollin nor any of the other nine crewmen's bodies were found and all ten are

listed on the Wall of the Missing at Margraten American National Cemetery, Netherlands.

Rollin Ball was a true American Hero. After escaping the wrath of the North Sea, he again climbed aboard a B-17 to help take out Hitler's means of making war by destroying his factories, submarines and infrastructure. This time the North sea won and Rollin forfeited the rest of his life to keep our world free for each one of us.

See Casualty Report for Marie Jane and 324th Mission Summary for Wilhelmshaven below

C A S U A L T Y R E P O R T

Date : 21 May 1943 Time :
Aircraft : B-17F 41 - 24515
Codes : DF - II ' MARIE JANE '
Group/Squadron : 91 BG -II- 324 BS
Base : Bassingbourn, Cambs.
Crash details : shot down by German fighters over sea. No trace of
crew was ever found.

Target : Wilhelmshaven, Germany.

Missing in Action : all commemorated on the Walls of the Missing
in Netherlands.

P	: FISCHER Philip S., 1/Lt.	0-430797	N J
CP	: FRESCHAUF Charles W., 1/Lt.	0-662770	NEBR
N	: BALL Rollin P., 2/Lt.	0-793974	MD
B	: JOSLIN John W. Jr., 1/Lt.	0-727103	ARIZ
RO	: MARGASON Mark W., S/Sgt.	06555415	OREG
E	: HARVEY Herbert H., T/Sgt.	39083331	CAL
BTG	: COLE Robert W., S/Sgt.	11032173	MASS
WG	: KOHN Sidney L., S/Sgt.	37133071	MO
WG	: SIMPSON Willard O., S/Sgt.	37117178	IOWA
TG	: JONES Jearld H., S/Sgt.	18097038	ARIZ

(42) Wilhelshaven

.21 May 1943

<u>A/C</u>	<u>PILOT</u>	<u>CLAIMS</u>	<u>CASUALTIES</u>	<u>BATTLE DAMAGE</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
399	Lt. Smith	Abortive - 3 electric suites out.			
857	Lt. Miller	Missing			
053	Lt. Koll	Missing			
515	Lt. Fischer	Missing			
480	Lt. DeBaun	None	None	Minor	Vicious E/A attacks.
487	Jackson	0 - 1 - 0	2 wounded	Moderate	Pilot & Co-Pilot Budhart wounded.
527	Lt. Cox	1 - 0 - 2	None	Minor	None

Target: - 9 Sub slips

Squadron Losses: - 3 A/C (30 missing, 2 wounded)

Group Losses: - 4 A/C (40 missing, 9 wounded)

Remarks: - Especially vicious E/A attacks accounted for 4 of our A/C. We lost Lt. Retchin, A/C 657, 323rd in addition to above.
Weather not too good. Bombing results unobserved - probably poor.