

6 July 1945.

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Casualty Branch.

SUBJECT: Review and Determination of Status
Under the Missing Persons Act.

I. - FACTS

1. The following-named persons of the 371st Bombardment Squadron, 307th Bombardment Group, have been carried on War Department records as missing in action over Yap Island, since 5 July 1944, while in flying status as reported on SWP Shipment No. 126:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>GRADE</u>
Bilder, Marcel J.	0743560	First Lieutenant
Brown, Lester P., Jr.	0751880	First Lieutenant
Rice, Edward J.	0683585	First Lieutenant
Smith, Kenneth D.	0691003	First Lieutenant
Griggs, Tommy W.	38,228,054	Technical Sergeant
Silko, Thomas B.	13,038,652	Technical Sergeant
Tampio, Benjamin T.	16,022,254	Staff Sergeant
Manfredi, Sam M.	36,615,401	Staff Sergeant
Painter, Earle W.	13,119,229	Staff Sergeant
Reed, Donald E.	35,740,776	Staff Sergeant
Stein, Sol	12,181,708	Staff Sergeant

2. Missing Air Crew Report AEF No. 6526, dated 6 July 1944, states that the subject personnel were the crew of a B-24J aircraft No. 44-4061. They left their base 5 July 1944 to participate in a combat mission. The bomber sustained damage early in combat and became the target for a concentrated attack by enemy planes. It was last seen at 7°15'N, 139°55'E, a position southeast of Yap Island in the Caroline Group.

a. Attached to the Missing Air Crew Report are three statements and a report of the search made for the crew. The first statement by the Intelligence Officer, 1st Lt. Philip D. Thompson contains the following

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Identification Branch

"* * * About fifteen minutes after the fight started, Lt. Rice * * * was forced to feather #1 engine, which is believed to have been hit by a 20 mm shell. He apparently had considerable difficulty in this as the operation had to be repeated several times. The attacking fighters, seeing his difficulty, immediately concentrated on him and made pass after pass. A little later #3 engine commenced to smoke. * * * After the Zekes left, Lt. Rice was still losing altitude and flying speed. His ship was smoking at the right wing root and flames appeared at this spot. At about this time he told Lt. Johnson over VHF that he was going to have to make a water landing. It was now evident that the fire was getting out of control. He started a series of fairly steep dives and pull outs. After the third pull out five men were seen to bail out at 2500 feet, three through the camera hatch and two through the bomb bays. The plane then slid steeply on its left wing, indicating that the pilot and co-pilot had left the controls and were preparing to jump. Fire was all over the ship by this time beginning at the right wing root and coming out of the waist windows. The plane crashed into the water, and exploded violently on impact.

"All 5 chutes were seen to open. Lt. Johnson * * * circled the area for 25 minutes. All five men were seen swimming in the water, 3 fairly close together in one group and two rather separated. A 5 man life raft was tossed out and one of the men was seen swimming toward it. There was also a plane from 424th Squadron circling the area and it also dropped a life raft. In addition another life raft was observed in the area, believed to have been released from Lt. Rice's plane. The closest survivor to any raft was no nearer than 300 yards of it. It is extremely doubtful if any of the 6 men did not seen to bail out survived the crash."

The statement of 1st Lt. Melvin L. Love who was flying slightly to the right of the bomber in question and about 2,000 feet above it contains practically the same information with this addition:

"I saw the chutes of four men who had bailed out. I saw the last chute open after the plane fell off on its left wing with fire visible at #3 engine. Apparently at this time the pilot and co-pilot had left the controls to bail out. I then saw the ship hit the water and explode on impact. I saw Lt. Johnson and a ship from the 424th squadron circling the men in the water and I continued on to Base with the formation."

The statement by Lt. Howard B. Johnson contains no additional information. The report of the special search mission shows that three planes took off approximately two hours after the crash, made 100% coverage with negative results. The search altitude was 1,000 feet.

b. A sketch map attached to the Missing Air Crew Report locates the place of the crash at 7°15' N, -139°55' E, a spot approximately 150 miles southeast of Yap island and 75 miles southwest of Sorol Islands.

3. Headquarters 307th Bombardment Group in a 5th Indorsement to a request from The Adjutant General's Office dated 24 August 1944 inviting attention to War Department Circular 195, paragraph 6c, dated 1943, states in part as follows:

"2. Five survivors were seen active in the water, thus indicating a condition of unimpaired physical abilities. Two rafts were dropped by circling aircraft and a third raft was seen on the surface, presumably released from the downed aircraft. It is possible that a second raft was released or found floating from the same source, thus causing a total of four possible available rafts.

"3. Due to the possibility of one or more additional rafts other than the three found empty on the succeeding day, and due to the condition of the survivors when sighted, circumstances do not exist that can lead to a logical conclusion of 'Death'."

4. An examination of the files of the above mentioned officers and enlisted men in the Casualty Branch, Officers' Branch and Enlisted Branch, AGO and the index in the Prisoner of War Information Bureau, PWGO, reveals nothing further relevant to this review.

II. - CONCLUSIONS

1. These officers and enlisted men were the crew of a Liberator bomber which was severely damaged by enemy aircraft and crashed about 150 miles from Yap Island, and 75 miles southwest of the Sorol Islands. Five persons were seen to parachute from the plane, and were swimming in the water at the last observation. Three life rafts were nearby but the closest survivor to any one of them was about 300 yards away. The following day, the three rafts were found empty. A search was made at 1000 feet altitude by three planes about two hours after the crash, with negative results.

2. In view of the foregoing, it appears that these persons may not reasonably be presumed to be living.

III. - RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that findings of death be made as of 6 July 1945, in the cases of the persons named in paragraph 1, Part I, hereof, under the provisions of Section 5 of the Missing Persons Act.

Investigator

Captain, AGD

CONCURRED IN:

APPROVED:

JOHN T. BURNS
Lieutenant Colonel
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Status Review and
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GEORGE F. HERBERT
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Chief, Casualty Branch

First Lieutenant Marcel J. Bilder,
0743560, Air Corps and 10 Others.