

AG 704 - Missing (16 Jul 45)
S. R. & D. No. 3521

16 July 1945

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Casualty Branch.

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

I. - FACTS

1. The persons named below were reported missing in action over Yap Island by SWP Shipments Nos. 137 and 160 and have been carried on War Department records as missing in action since 15 July 1944: (To facilitate reference each crew has been assigned a number which is shown in column 4 below.)

<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Crew Number</u>
Principe, Joseph S.	0689581	First Lieutenant	1
Rowan, Walter C.	0673904	First Lieutenant	1
Sylor, Ulma H.	0803306	First Lieutenant	1
Callaway, Jack S., Jr.	0767739	Second Lieutenant	3
Camp, Sam, Jr.	0696746	Second Lieutenant	1
Diederich, Anthony F.	0697342	Second Lieutenant	2
Garrett, Eugene W.	0708251	Second Lieutenant	2
Klinofelter, Leslie E.	0765808	Second Lieutenant	3
Pomeroy, Robert W.	0768215	Second Lieutenant	2
Sekanics, Andrew	0703402	Second Lieutenant	2
Harder, Charles J.	T124507	Flight Officer	4
Keefe, Francis R.	11,116,730	Technical Sergeant	1
Vetrecin, Michael G., Jr.	15,320,307	Technical Sergeant	1
Dickerson, Clarence W.	35,442,185	Staff Sergeant	1
Hitchcock, James H.	39,256,020	Staff Sergeant	1
Jacobs, Robert F.	33,738,013	Staff Sergeant	2
Hiller, Ruben O.	15,323,660	Staff Sergeant	1
Seiler, Kenneth W.	32,762,907	Staff Sergeant	2
Smethurst, Harold A., Jr.	12,040,886	Staff Sergeant	3
Waters, William W., Jr.	16,168,122	Staff Sergeant	1

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16 July 45
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<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Crew Number</u>
Crowley, William E.	16,004,052	Sergeant	2
McNab, Sherlock T., Jr.	14,101,598	Sergeant	3
Moore, William E.	36,647,606	Sergeant	2
Bauer, Chester	33,734,914	Corporal	3
Dunbar, John O., Jr.	37,540,207	Corporal	2
Hundley, Clint D.	38,135,303	Corporal	2
Patla, Joseph C.	16,170,402	Corporal	3
Reynolds, Charles F.	37,676,896	Corporal	2

2. Missing Air Crew Reports submitted in this case show that on 15 July 1944 B-24 aircraft based in the Admiralty Islands were flown on a combat mission to Yap Island, which is located at the coordinates 09° 35' North, 138° 10' East in the Caroline Islands. The following paragraphs, Nos. 3 through 5, summarize the information available in the case of each crew involved.

3. Crew No. 1:

a. Missing Air Crew Report No. 6923, dated 17 July 1944, states that B-24 plane No. 44-40555 of 370th Bombardment Squadron, 307th Bombardment Group, was seen to crash as the result of a collision with B-24 plane No. 42-73119. The accident occurred at approximately 12:00 at the position 09° 08' North, 138° 17' East. A flight strip may attached to the Report shows that the location of the crash was about 25 miles southeast of Yap Island. The personnel named below formed the complete crew:

<u>Crew Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Grade</u>
P	Sylor, Ulna E.	0803706	1st Lt
CP	Camp, Sam, Jr.	0696746	2d Lt
N	Principe, Joseph S.	0829583	1st Lt
B	Rowan, Walter C.	0673904	1st Lt
E	Vetresin, Michael G., Jr.	15,320,207	T/Sgt
AE	Miller, Ruben O.	15,323,000	S/Sgt
RO	Keefe, Francis R.	11,116,700	T/Sgt
ARO	Waters, William W., Jr.	18,162,227	S/Sgt
G	Hitchcock, James M.	39,256,000	S/Sgt
G	Dickerson, Clarence W.	35,442,185	S/Sgt
N	Harder, Charles J.	T124507	F/O

The Missing Air Crew Report states that Flight Officer Harder was aboard the plane in the capacity of Observer. The pertinent parts of three eyewitness statements inclosed with the Report are quoted below:

Statement by Lieutenant James P. Hobstetter:

"The crash involving Lt. Saylor occurred shortly after our withdrawal from the target area, the exact distance from this area I cannot accurately say. The leader of our squadron was pulling up on the right of a seven ship formation lead by the group leader in an effort to present a group front to enemy interception. My position at the time was C-2; Lt. Saylor was approximately in a C-3 position with Lt. Diederich on his left wing.

" * * * The ship piloted by Lt. Diederich crashed into Lt. Saylor striking him behind the flight deck. The left wing of Lt. Diederich's plane was torn away and Lt. Saylor's ship was severed in half just back of the flight deck. Both planes burst immediately into flames and went down. Although reports indicate that several men bailed out of the burning planes no parachutes were observed by the members of my crew. * * *

Statement by Corporal George W. Krum:

"The B-24's were in even a closer formation and all at once the B-24 in C-3 position banked steeply to the right and up and struck the plane flying C-1 position, with the first contact being made by the props of C-3 plane against the bottom of the fuselage just behind the wing section of C-1 plane, as it began chewing its way through the fuselage proper. C-3 plane then began exploding from both wings and the planes both went to pieces.

"The complete wing sections of both planes stuck together in sort of a 'X' design and fell separately. The wing section of C-3 plane broke out in flames and exploded as soon as it hit C-1 plane--it fell fairly well in pieces as it descended. C-1's wing section fell in one piece in sort of a falling leaf pattern and seemed little hurt--being apparently intact from

the nose section to just behind the wing and fuselage point where it had been chewed in tow. Some turrets from both planes were thrown from their wells and were left to fall clear with other pieces of the wreckage. When we were at about a mile or so from where the accident occurred chutes began to open at about 8000'. I would say at least five of them puffed into view in quick succession. By then the Zeros were making passes at ours and surrounding B-24's as fast as they could so I left off watching the falling chutes to fight off the attacks being made on the bottom of our ship. Bombs were away at 1211K and the approximate time of the collision was 1220K. I am the ball gunner on the crew of Lt. Gage and am reporting this as an eyewitness account of what I saw."

Statement of Corporal Raymond R. Altieri:

"I didn't see the crash itself but I noticed the pieces flying by our tail. The wings were interlocked and were going down in flames, the biggest piece I noticed was the tail end of the fuselage of the last ship. This piece extended from the waist window to the tail. I noticed four bodies tumbling down and one parachute open also and empty life raft. Most of the parts were burning when they hit the water and were pouring black smoke. After we were out of sight of the wreckage I saw a large column of grey smoke rise above some clouds."

4. Crew No 2:

a. Missing Air Crew Report No. 6924, dated 17 July 1944, states that B-24 plane No. 42-73119 of 372nd Bombardment Squadron, 307th Bombardment Group, piloted by Lieutenant Diederich, collided with plane No. 44-40553 while on a combat mission to Yap Island. The collision occurred at approximately 1220K at the position 09° 08' North, 138° 17' East. (See paragraph 3, above.) The following-named persons formed the complete crew:

<u>Crew Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Grade</u>
P	Diederich, Anthony F.	0697342	2d Lt
CP	Pomeroy, Robert W.	0768215	2d Lt

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<u>Crew</u> <u>Position</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>ASN</u>	<u>Grade</u>
N	Garrett, Eugene W.	0708251	2d Lt
B	Sekrnics, Andrew	0703402	2d Lt
E	Sciler, Kenneth W.	32,762,907	S/Sgt
AE	Hundley, Clint D.	38,135,303	Cpl
EO	Jacobs, Robert F.	33,738,013	S/Sgt
ARO	Reynolds, Charles F.	37,676,896	Cpl
G	Dunbar, John O., Jr.	37,540,207	Cpl
AG	Crowley, William E.	16,004,052	Sgt
CG	Moore, William E.	36,647,606	Sgt

Three eyewitness statements attached to the Report contain essentially the same information as that given in paragraph 3, above. One of these statements reads as follows:

Statement of Lieutenant Earl F. Rice, Jr.

"Plane #119 was awaying back and forth in formation and suddenly dropped right wing and pooled onto plane #555 cutting #555 into. No. 2 engine of #119 came out of wing and left wing fell off; plane then broke up and flames came out from fuselage. When #555 broke in half (behind trailing edge of wing) it also burst into flames. Bodies came out of both ships, but from my position I could not see any parachutes open. This happened approximately ten minutes from target area. I was pilot of plane #803 flying in a formation to the right of and a short distance behind the two planes."

b. Morning Report Locator Card filed in Sergeant Moore's Enlistment Jacket showing him as assigned to the 307th Bombardment Group on 21 July 1944 is obviously in error. Rosters for the month of July 1944 of the 372nd Bombardment Squadron show that he was missing in action 15 July 1944.

5. Crew No 3:

a. Missing Air Crew Report No. 7180, dated 18 July 1944, states that B-24 aircraft No. 42-40857 of 371st Bombardment Squadron,

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Radio Operator, Sgt. McHob were in the forward part of the plane. All others were in the tail section. The front section of the plane had just started to submerge and wasn't more than three or four feet under when I got out. The Co-Pilot, Lt. Callaway, and the Radio Operator, Sgt. McHob were already out by the time I got out. I know Sgt McHob got hurt pretty badly in the landing as his face was bleeding. After getting out I saw others swimming around but was unable to identify them. I soon reached a life raft and tried to get to those that were swimming around in the water but the swells were large and I drifted away. I didn't see any other rafts. On the afternoon of 17 July 1944 I heard a plane overhead. I threw sea marker around my raft and shot up some flares. The plane spotted me, however in circling overhead it also spotted the other raft with Lt. Wiley, Sgt. Gilbert, Cpl. Ashby and Cpl Erickson and picked them up before taxiing over to pick me up. We were picked up about 1530 by a Navy PBY.

Statement of Lieutenant Richard D. Wiley:

"* * * All except the pilot, co-pilot and radio operator (Lt. Kizer, Lt. Callaway and Sgt. McHob respectively), were in the tail section of the plane. The plane twisted and broke in tow just in back of the ball turret almost immediately upon making the landing. The forward section sank quickly, but the tail section floated for about three or four minutes. After I had gotten into the water after the crash I took count and was able to account for everyone but the Engineer, S/Sgt. Smothurst. After this I was busy trying to find a life raft and I finally got into a raft with Sgt. Gilbert, Cpl Erickson and Cpl Ashby. Just before dawn on the first night we heard calls from others in another raft. We called back and tried to make them understand to stay close to us, but by dawn we had drifted apart, and we never did see the raft. I believe

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I recognized the voices of two men and believe them to be Lt. Klinckalter, the bombardier, and Cpl. Patla, a gunner. We were picked up on our second day in the raft at about 1530 by a Navy PBV.

A statement by Lieutenant William H. Blair who witnessed the forces landing is also attached to the Report. He states that approximately 8 men were seen in the water and that a life raft was dropped from his plane. An account of the search inclosed with the Report shows that searches were conducted for three days. On 16 July a radio signal was picked up and followed until it ceased but sightings were negative. Five men of the crew were picked up by a Catalina on 17 July. The search was continued on 18 July with negative results.

b. A letter, dated 25 September 1944, from this office to the Commanding General, USAF, Southwest Pacific Area, requested that the status of the missing personnel from this plane be reviewed and invited attention to Section 6c, WD Circular 195, 1943. In the 5th Indorsement, dated 27 October 1944, Headquarters, 307th Bombardment Group, stated that the status of the subject persons should remain "missing in action" for the following reasons: All crew members were seen out of the plane; the evidence indicates that the missing persons were aboard a third raft and they could have drifted to some island or have been picked up by an enemy vessel. Inclosure No. 1 to this correspondence is a statement, dated 25 October 1944, by Staff Sergeant Robert C. Lohby and Corporal James W. Erickson, survivors, which reads as follows:

"On the return from Yap Island on 15 July 1944, the airplane in which we were riding was forced to make a water landing due to engine trouble. We were both riding in the waist of the airplane at the time. All members were out of the airplane when it sunk after about 5 minutes. We saw and identified every one in the water, clear of the plane, except Lt. Callaway and Sgt. Smethurst. Both of these men were seen either by Lt. Kizer or Sgt. Gilbert (both missing in action from later missions) to be clear of the plane. Sgt. Heibub was injured in the landing. His head was bleeding and he said that his legs were smashed. Just before dawn on the first night we heard

voices coming from another raft and believe we recognized the voices of Lt. Klinefelter and Corporal Patls. About midday the second day we spotted the balloon from the 'Gibson Girl' which was on the other raft, which came out of the right wing. It is our opinion that the men who were not rescued are in all probability dead. However, considering the rate of drift, and the fact that we were in enemy waters, there is a good possibility that they could have drifted to a small island or have been picked up by an enemy vessel."

c. Navy Hydrographic Office advised that currents in the area average 12 to 18 miles per day and that the plane landed between the north equatorial current which flows east and the south equatorial current which flows west. Between these currents are many eddies and countercurrents.

d. The AG 201 file of Sergeant McErb contains a letter, dated 19 March 1945, from his mother who forwarded information which she had received from the survivors of the crew and from her son's commanding officer. This letter reads in part as follows:

"3. That the third raft on which Sherlock, Jr., would have to be if he were to survive, was seen by rescued members of the crew; that it was seen to have a balloon supporting an aerial just before the other crewmen were rescued, AND THAT, a signal from this third raft's radio had been picked up by a rescue plane, but could not be followed up when the signal broke off. Rescued crewmen from other rafts saw the balloon when it broke loose, bearing out the assumption by the CO that the aerial must have broken, stopping the signal, and that another aerial was not available."

6. An examination of the Officers Branch, Enlisted Branch and Casualty Branch files of these persons, and the index in the Prisoner of War Information Bureau, PWGO, revealed no relevant information not considered herein.

II. - CONCLUSIONS

1. On 15 July 1944 three B-24 planes based in the Admiralty Islands were lost on a combat mission to Yap Island in the Caroline Islands. This case concerns the crew members of these three planes. Only five of the thirty-three persons aboard these planes have been accounted for.

2. Shortly after leaving the target area, plane No. 44-40555 piloted by Lieutenant Saylor of Crew No. 1 and plane No. 42-73119 piloted by Lieutenant Diederich of Crew No. 2 collided at the position of $09^{\circ} 08'$ North, $138^{\circ} 17'$ East, about 25 miles southeast of Yap Island. Lieutenant Saylor's plane broke in half just behind the wing section and a wing fell off Lieutenant Diederich's plane. Both planes caught on fire and fell into the water. One eyewitness reported seeing 5 parachutes open at about 8000 feet. Other persons on the mission saw bodies fall but no parachutes open. Each plane carried an eleven-man crew, all of who are still missing in action.

3. Crew No. 3 aboard plane No. 42-40857 made a forced water landing at 1616, local time, at the position $01^{\circ} 50'$ North, $144^{\circ} 18'$ East, about 350 miles northwest of the Admiralty Islands. Five members of the eleven-man crew were rescued by a PBY plane on 17 July 1944. According to the survivors, all crew members escaped from the plane which sank in about 4 minutes. Sergeant McJob was injured in the landing. The survivors were on two life rafts and it was believed that the missing personnel were on a third raft. Just before dawn on the first night, crew members on one raft heard calls from another raft and believed that they recognized the voices of Lieutenant Klinfelter and Corporal Patla. Two survivors also reported seeing the balloon for the radio aerial which was on the third raft. A search plane picked up a radio signal on 17 July 1944 and followed the direction of the signal until it stopped. However, no sightings were made. It was the opinion of the organization headquarters that these men could have drifted to some island or been picked up by an enemy vessel. The rate of drift in this area is 12 to 13 miles a day, and the plane went down between the north equatorial current which flows east and the south equatorial current which flows west.

4. A period of twelve months has now elapsed since the subject personnel have been seen or heard from by anyone. However, they went down in Japanese-controlled waters and the Japanese Government has been very negligent in reporting prisoners of war in their hands. In view of the foregoing it appears that these officers and enlisted men should be continued in the status of missing in action.

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III. O RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the personnel named in paragraph 1, Part I, hereof, be continued in the status of missing in action, as of 16 July 1945, under the provisions of Section 5 of the Missing Persons Act.

/i/ MBH
Investigator

Captain, AGD

CONCURRED IN:

APPROVED:

/i/ JTB
JOHN T. BURNS
Lieutenant Colonel, AGD
Officer in Charge
Status Review and
Determination Section

/i/ GPH
GEORGE F. HERBERT
Colonel, AGD
Chief, Casualty Branch

First Lieutenant Joseph S. Principe,
0689581, et al.

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