

ABERNATHY & CREW FINISH A TOUR

Lieut ABERNATHY and crew was one of the crews from the 856th Squadron who were placed on DS to perform Leaflet Dropping Operations at Cheddington.

The crew was immediately put to work and continuously engaged in this activity. The importance of the missions was such that they flew every night that weather conditions permitted - and sometimes when the weather didn't. The Abernathy crew rapidly accomplished sixteen missions. The final mission of their tour would be the seventeenth on Nickles Operations.

On December 11 1944, the Abernathy crew took off on their final mission before returning to the Zone of Interior. They left Cheddington airdrome at 1645 hours, fully load d with material for the shattering and destruction of the morale of German troops and civilians. The trip out was uneventful and the aircraft appeared to be performing normally as they approached their target in Holland.

While making the dropping run, the oil pressure on #1 engine was feathered and the drop made with only three engines. At the completion of the dropping run, Lt. ABERNATHY turned his aircraft out over the North Sea, heading for home.

As the entire crew can testify, sweating out the last mission by flying on three engines over the cold, seemingly-endless, and definately wet North Sea was truly an experience, especially when their confidence in the performance of the other three engines was skeptical.

The aircraft was directed to divert at Woodbridge because of the emergency and also because the weather wasn't so good anywhere else. ABERNATHY's ship came over the Woodbridge airdrome at 2500 feet and they circled the field for 30 minutes trying to free the windsheilds of ice which had formed and obstructed their vision. Last mission.., only three engines... and ice - these were the thoughts of the crew members as they circled the

drome. The only consoling factor was that at least they were over a drome. The ice finally broke away and as the plane lowered into the traffic pattern on the downwind leg at 2,000 feet, Lt. OARD, the copilot, looked at his watch... "1935 hours," he announced over the interphone, "only two more minutes and we'll complete this damn mission."

The aircraft turned into the base leg and descended to 1800 feet. On the last turn of the pattern, from the base leg to the final approach, while the plane was in a 90° bank to the left, the #2 engine suddenly ran away. With one engine dead and one running away on the pivoting left wing, it was impossible to raise the wing up level and the plane slowly began to stall and lose altitude. Struggling with the controls, the pilot and copilot somewhat lifted the wing of the lumbering B-24 and found that they were just off course for the runway and skimming the treetops. They decided to try to bring the crippled aircraft up into level flight and go around again for another try but it was impossible to regain complete control of the aircraft. They continued to lose altitude and after clipping the tops of some trees, it was decided to put it down and crashland.

The aircraft crashed in the approaching zone just short and off to the left of the runway, resulting in complete demolition of the aircraft. Miraculously, all crew members escaped from the crash uninjured. The first remark made when the crew was all together was by co-pilot OARD: "Well, its 1938 hours, I miscalculated it by one minute." "Yes," retorted Pilot-ABERNATHY, "I was damn anxious to get back from that one, but not in that much of a hurry."

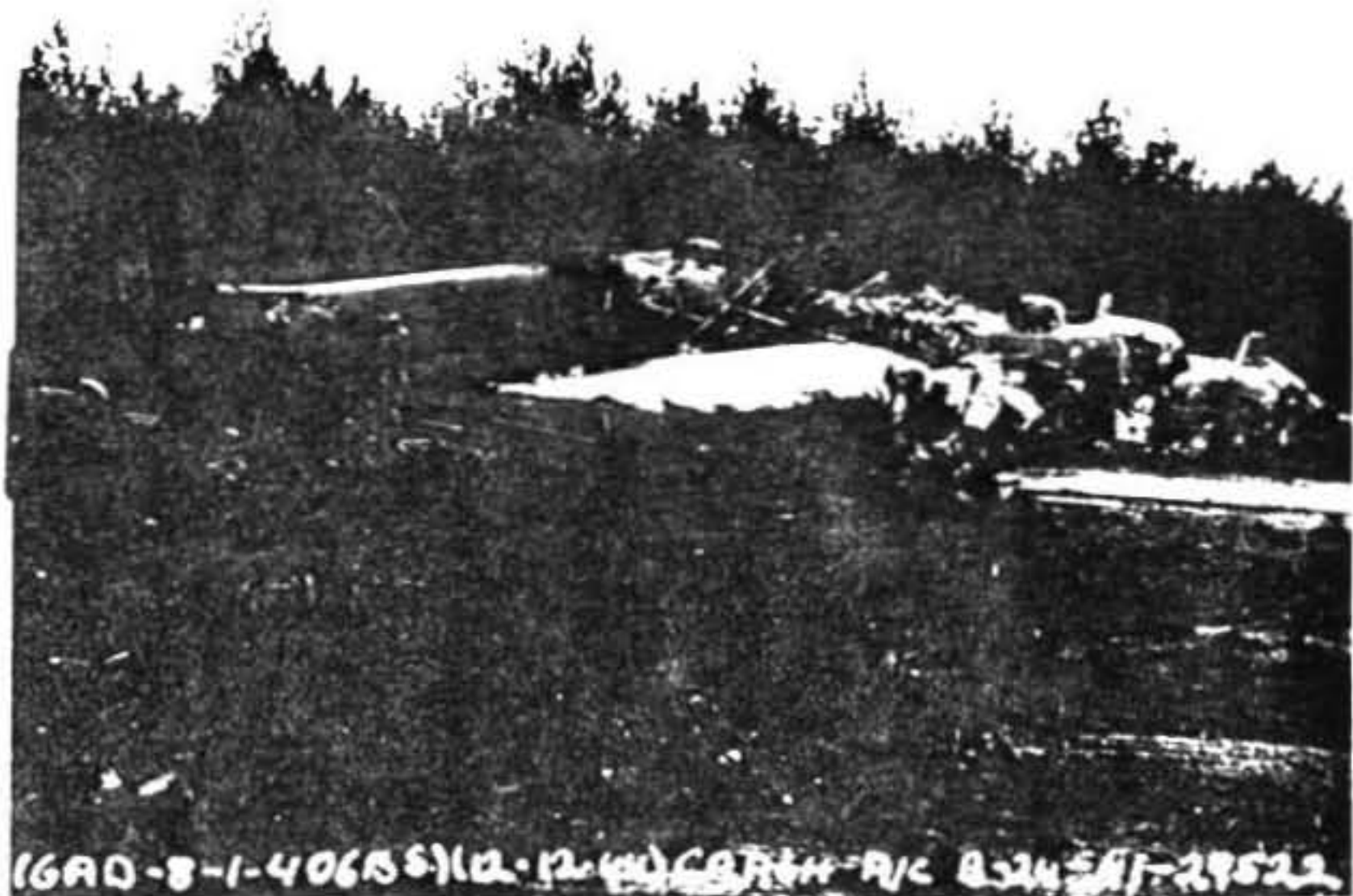
Thus the Abernathy crew completed their tour in this theatre. The strain of the return trip and the shock of the crash required a period of leave and rest for the crew members and while the final preparations were being made for their departure to the States, they were granted leaves.

As this crew returns to the States for reassignment, many of the details and events of their tour in the European Theatre may be forgotten, but their climatic flight of December 11, 1944, will remain with them forever.

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VIEWS OF THE ABERNATHY SHIP - ABOVE - Note that despite 2 engines being out on the left wing, the plane was righted and came in for crash-landing in level position, cutting an even swath through the trees just to the left of the approach zone. BELOW - Left to right, Pilot ABERNATHY and Copilot ORAD, accompanied by two other officers, view the wreckage which they so miraculously walked away from. As a tribute to the pilotage, the Air Force has a saying... "Any landing that you can walk away from is a good landing."





ABOVE - Front view, showing tattered left wing which did the tree clipping. BELOW - Forward fuselage showing the torn pilot's compartment and the hole through which the Pilot, Copilot, Navigator & Bombardier escaped after the crash.



6AD-10-1-40685(30-12-44) Accident A/C R-24-129486

