

SHEPPARD CRASH

On 18 March 45, Lt. SHEPPARD and crew, who had just arrived from the States and assigned to the 856th Bomb Squadron from the 857th Squadron, were scheduled for a night cross-country training flight as part of the OTU program.

The crew took off from the Harrington drome at 2000 hours and proceeded on course to Overton Heath and then to Cinderford. At 2115 hours while on the Cinderford - Shrewsbury leg at 2100 feet, the aircraft suddenly struck the side of the Berywen Mountain Range, in the vicinity of Llangying, North Wales. At this point, the range reached the altitude of 2150 feet and was estimated on a 15 degree incline. The aircraft had apparently been flying up the valley and struck the ground approximately 50 feet below the crest of the mountain. The plane struck the ground while in level flight and came to rest 500 yards from the first point of impact. The plane had struck the ground a glancing blow, the incline of the slope serving to lessen the force of impact and preventing a more serious and fatal crash. The nose and waist sections of the aircraft which absorbed the full impact of the crash were completely smashed and large portions of the fuselage in these sections were torn completely from the aircraft, carrying with them the bodies of the Bombardier, Navigator, and both Waist Gunners. These crew members were instantly killed and their bodies badly crushed. The force of the crash "tossed" the tail gunner completely out of his turret, backward, and landed in the mid-section of the aircraft. Other than the shake up he received from this tumble, he was otherwise uninjured. He immediately got out of the aircraft through the waist window and went up on the wing to assist the copilot in getting the remainder of the crew out. Copilot BRADBURY, suffering a fractured leg, minor bruises, lacerations and abrasions of face, hands and legs. He was also quite a bit shaken up after riding out the careening run of the smashed aircraft but managed to climb out through the window and made a hurried

search about the exterior of the crash to determine the danger of fire or explosion. Finding nothing, he returned and with the assistance of the tail gunner, freed the engineer from his imprisoned position in the upper turret. The cover of the turret was broken open and the engineer crawled out with no injuries other than minor bruises and lacerations. These men then helped the injured Radio Operator and Pilot out the escape hatch. The pilot was suffering from simple fractures on both his right thigh and skull, serious abrasions and lacerations on scalp and forehead. The Radio Operator had sustained a fractured pelvis and bruises on legs and thighs. As these men were taken out of the aircraft the rain continued to pour down. The men tore open parachutes and made bandages from the cuts and used the others to cover the injured men to keep them dry and warm.

It was then decided to seek help and while the engineer stayed with the injured men, the copilot and tail gunner set out, each going in an opposite direction.

The tail gunner walked along the mountain slope until he felt that he was accomplishing nothing. The void darkness and rain made visibility almost impossible and as he proceeded, he was observing as best he could that the area was not becoming less a wilderness and so he decided to turn around and return to the scene of the crash before becoming completely and hopelessly lost. It was later learned that the decision of Sgt BLANTON was fortunate for his sake because any further progress would have led him into a bog consisting mainly of quicksand and baring the survival of that, a 500 foot cliff awaited him just beyond.

Lt. BRADBURY went down the mountain side and just after dawn, found a sheppards hut. After explaining the incident, the shepard rode BRADBURY on the handle-bars of his bicycle to the headquarters of the Home Guard. From this point a search and rescue party was organized and set out to find the crashed aircraft.

The rescue party set out and was having difficulty in finding the location because of the limited visioility and also, the exact whereabouts of the crash was still unknown although Lt. Bradbury was among them. Suddenly, out of the hazy, dismal distance, a flare burned a slow arch through the mists, giving the rescue party an idea of the direction and approximate distance to the scene of the crash. Sgt MATTINGLY, the Radio Operator had somehow managed to crawl and reenter the wrecked aircraft and found the flare gun and a flare. He then struggled to get back outside and had only gotten half-way out when his strength gave out. In this position, half in and half out the wreckage, he fired the flare which materially aided and speeded up the rescue party in reaching the scene. Sgt MATTINGLY then collapsed immediately. When he became conscience again, he could not remember any of these events, he had no impression of ever leaving his position under the B-24's wing and the parachute wrappings. For his heroic deed, he draws a complete blank.

The injured men were taken down the mountains by the rescue party to the Home Guard post. All the men were then evacuated by a RAF and civilian ambulances to a civilian hospital nearby while the rescue party again returned to the scene to pick up the remains of the killed crew members.

The following day, the airmen were taken to the 68th General Hospital at Whittington.

The crew members of the aircraft were: Lt RANDOLPH J. SHEPPARD (Pilot) Lt JULIAN W. BRADBURY (Copilot), P/O JOHN A. ROGERS (Navigator), Lt V.L.D. SHEAPER (Bombardier), Sgt JAMES R. GREEN (Engineer), Cpl JOHN F. MATTINGLY (Radio Operator), Sgt WILLIE KOUSER (W/Gunner), Pfc WHITNEY HOLATA (W/Gunner), and Sgt DAVID U. BLANTON (T/Gunner). Lt BRADBURY, Sgt BLANTON and Cpl MATTINGLY remained with the Squadron and after a short period of rest, were again back on combat. Lt SHEPPARD and Sgt GREEN were seriously injured and were relieved from the Squadron, being transferred to the General Hospital. P/O ROGERS,

Lieut SHEAFER, Sgt KOUSER and Pfc HOLTA were instantly killed in the crash and they were buried with full military honors at the Cambridge American Military Cemetery at Cambridge, England on 23 March 1945.