

THE BRONAR INCIDENT

On 4 January 1945, Captain ROBERT W. BRONAR, (Pilot) and crew on Temporary Duty at Cheddington for leaflet dropping operations, took off on their "paper route" mission. Upon gaining altitude, the aircraft proceeded out over the Channel and on to their target which was in the Arnhem salient. While at 22,000 feet just prior to reaching the target area, #4 engine suddenly conked out. Captain BRONAR made necessary adjustments and decided to complete the drop. The plane was gradually losing altitude and was down to 18,000 feet when the leaflets were dropped. Captain BRONAR then headed for Brussels in order to reach the safety of friendly territory and airdromes as soon as possible. As the plane struggled along toward the Belgian capital, a British anti-aircraft battery at Namur opened up at the unidentified aircraft. On the 1st salvo, the crack shooting British hit the right wing of the aircraft and scored a direct hit on #3 engine. While the pilot and copilot struggled to keep the aircraft under control with numbers 3 & 4 engines out and flak bursting all about them, Captain BRONAR ordered that the colors of the day be shown. However, a malfunction of the flare gun prevented the colors of the day being fired. Meanwhile, the aircraft was hit with 2 more salvos, this time causing damage to #1 engine.

The aircraft was now losing altitude fast. With 2 engines out and one damaged, the flak still concentrated and accurate, and no hope to identify the aircraft as friendly, Captain BRONAR gave the order for the remainder of the crew to bail out. Everyone went out but the pilot and copilot. While still proceeding along in their crippled aircraft, radio contact with the ground defenses was attempted but with no success. At 8000 feet, Captain BRONAR ordered the copilot out. After Lieut BOWEN had left the ship, Captain Bronar tried to bring the faltering #1 engine back into service, and to make radio contact. With Captain BRONAR's attention thus diverted, the flying speed of

the aircraft gradually became slower and slower, and then suddenly began to stall out. However, the Captain quickly recovered and put the plane into a glide. Having decided that the safe return of the aircraft was now impossible, Captain BRONAR jumped out at 4,000 feet and saw his plane crash and burn below him as he drifted downward.

Captain BRONAR landed in a small clearing without incident. After hiding his chute and gathering himself together, he heard voices nearby. He could not distinguish the sound of the voices and not knowing for sure his location, walked away in the opposite direction. Shortly after this, BRONAR found a small road which appeared not to be used regularly and he followed it until he came to a house. He decided to approach it for help. As he came up to the door of the house, an elderly lady inside the house saw him as she opened the door to come out. Mistaking him for a German in the darkness, the lady slammed the door in his face. Captain BRONAR called out to her in broken French and soon convinced her that he was an American. He was cautiously let in and definitely identified before the people would fully trust him. After the Captain explained as best he could what happened and gained their friendship, they asked him if he was injured and then fed and put him to bed for the night. The next day, Bronar found out the whereabouts of American troops and began making his way in that direction. As he was behind the friendly lines, that is, in an area which had been overrun by advancing spearheads, he soon was approached by a convoy. The convoy commander took him to an aid station and from there was taken to the 39th Field Hospital at Charleroi, Belgium. At Charleroi, Captain Bronar established contact with the personal pilot for General Hodges who flew Bronar to England on 8 January.

The remainder of the Bronar crew had bailed out near Namur and had landed very close together. After grouping up, they went to Namur and were returned to England through the 8th AF evacuation center at Namur. These crew members were:

Lieut GARTH BOWEN, (CP); Lieut HENRY T. DIXON, (Navigator); Lieut WILLIAM H. KIBBIE, (Bombardier); T/Sgt PRESLEY W. SMITH, (Engineer); S/Sgt THOMAS BRASWELL, Jr., (Radio Operator); Sgt ROBERT C. NELSON, (W/Gunner) and Sgt ROBERT C. WILLIAMS, (T/Gunner).

* * *

File with this operation

Report received by Lt Love from Capt Huffner relative Capt Broner and crew.

TO 406TH OVERSEAS

Capt Huffner called from Finetree at 1400, 5 January 44. He stated that Sgt F Eaton, W Gunner, ASN 37437602 had reported through the 29th Tac Air Comd thru Gargway to him as follows:

That he Sgt F Eaton had hailed out on return in general vicinity of the battle line - that the ship had been scored by searchlights and 'badly shot up' - that he had walked all night and had reported to Air Field A-87. Sgt Eaton was not in touch with any other crew members; however Sgt Eaton relayed the information to Finetree that he thought 'the other man had been able to hail out'. There was no information as to whether Sgt Eaton had sustained injury. The 406th Orderly room reports his ASN as being 37437622.

00 - 3-2

Tallb. Schotfield
1630 —

No info so far
from 9th ANF —
States he will call
back —

406TH BOMBARDMENT SQUADRON (H)
Office of the Intelligence Officer

INTERROGATION FORM
MISSION OF 4-5 Jan 1945

1 B-17 & 8 B-24 A/C TOOK-OFF BETWEEN 1720 AND 2020; LANDED BETWEEN 2203 AND 0036 HOURS.

A/C	PILOT	TARGET	BOMB LOAD	BOMBS AWAY	ALTITUDE	TAKE OFF	TIME LANDED
530	BRONAR	PROPOSED TARGET P 3075	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 3580	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 4378	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)				
		P 5082	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 5785	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)				
ROUTE:		Unheard from as of 0200 5 Jan 45					
865	ROBERTS	P 6587	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1944	24,000	1733	2203
✓		P 6987	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1944	"		
		P 7090 (VIELSAL)	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)	1944	"		
		P 7793	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1947	"		
		P 8587	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)	1947	"		
ROUTE:		Landed at 2203 - Engines Out Interrogation will follow on return.					
174	MARSHALL	P 6994	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 7596	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 8096	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1945	"		
		P 8597	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1947	"		
		P 8895	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1948	"		
ROUTE:		Base - Selsby Hill - Is Transport - Targets - 5003N0550E Targets - 5003N0550E - Is Transport - And Point - Base					
217	COPIER	P 6172	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1940	22,000'	1727	2204
✓		P 6762	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1944	"		
		P 7154 (WILTZ)	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)	1944	"		
		P 7752	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)	1945	"		
		P 7764 (CHERNAUX)	1 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)	1947	"		
ROUTE:		Base - Selsby Hill - Point Haut Camp - Targets - Point Haut Camp - And Point - Base					
637	BRACKELL	P 7982	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
✓		P 8075	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 8163	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 8252	1 - 20-98 1 - (TX263)				
		P 9041 (VLAERS)	2 - 20-98 2 - (TX263)	2020	20,500'	1705	2220
ROUTE:		Base - Selsby Hill - Point Haut Camp - Targets - Back same.					

First four targets not hit
Malfunction of bomb
lay doors. Probably
frozen. Dropped from
bombs on last target by
pushing with feet.

Tom,

An afterthought: according to Pat Carty (p 51 of Secret Squadrons of the Eighth), a ninth crew member, Sgt. Eaton, a gunner, also baled out but made his own way back via airfield A-89 (Le Culot, Belgium).

Tom.

Dans un e-mail daté du 20/07/2005 16:35:37 Romance Standard Time, webmaster@carpetbaggerops.org a écrit :

Tom,

Need your help on this one, article does not list plane number, and as you know,
Cheddington flights not in Harrington log...

Many Thanks,

TE, ret.