

Minor Ball 5807

WW2 Story of Lt Nauman (MIA) last Bombing Mission by a brave and desperate crew

By Marvin Nauman Registered 2017

"One of the Great Factual WWII Air war Stories. Kept us spellbound" Omroep Zeeland TV

Background: Researching Lt Nauman (Uncle Dan)

Pre 2006 all we knew about B-17 Pilot Uncle Dan was that he was shot down in Germany and made it to the English Channel and disappeared... that's it... just gone... no details.

My archeology daughter Sarah and I came across a roll of "Short Snorter" in my dad's safe deposit box, with his Bomber group stamped on one of the bills. With this roll of "Short Snorter" we began scouring the signatures looking for buddies and information that would provide us with what happen. We found the 351st reunion group, fellow pilots that flew with him, German & Dutch Flak Battery reports, 1 parachute drop zone, 2 crew mysteries investigated by the Army, Dear John letter, Grooming for Squadron Commander, Cat Mascot, 3 witness's that flew that day with him, one little girl of 12 witness still alive that saw the plane being shot down, and other information that gave us a story of what happened. I am told from both the pilots that served with him and others including the Media that have read the story, that this is the best research and one of the best fact based Air War stories they have seen.

The story is not finished, there are the missing jumpers, and plane that could still turn up with the oxygen mask for the cat mascot.

Research Facts:

- 13 years research.
- 1,000 + Research Hours.
- 8 Archive videos of Combat footage the 351st took part in.
- Clark Gables Film "Combat America". He filmed & flew with my Uncle.
- 150 Interviewed B-17 Pilots & 50 + Flight Personnel.
- Interviewed 3 witnesses on the mission.
- Interviewed 1 witness to the crash.
- 12 American, Dutch, & German Military Archives & Museums.
- The American Embassy in the Netherlands.
- The Dutch Royal Navy.
- 23 research specialist in America, Netherlands, and Germany.
- 4 Dutch Newspaper Articles & 5 TV interviews, including a 7 minute prime lead story.
- Countless Dutch Citizens that donated their time & resources to my mission.
- 3 Air Force Archives that went beyond the call of duty and found lost & forgotten records that had fallen behind file cabinets.
- 2 very busy & dedicated research experts that had previously tirelessly trolled though every German Luftwaffe Kill Report Record at the German Luftwaffe archive in Germany.

Lt Dan Nauman and Crew.

4 Oct 43 Frankfurt (MIA/KIA) 42-5807 DS-T Minor Ball

P	1st Lt. Daniel D. Nauman	0-664436	WIS
CP	2nd Lt. William R. Keister	0-741913	Ohio
N	1st Lt. Walter A. Blair	0-733518	Cal
NG	SSgt. Mario Suozzo	32555221	NJ
TTE	TSgt. Foy A. Rush	39610898	MONT
RO	TSgt. Robert F. Martin	38161488	TEX
LWG	SSgt. Lewis W. Burgess Jr.	15323465	OHIO
RWG	SSgt. Ralph G. Robeson	11087650	MASS
BT	SSgt. William R. Towsley	39321357	OREG
TG	SSgt. Willard O. Hunter	35477483	IND
Mascot	KiddyCat Unknown Stray/War Orphan		England

Pre Oct 2, 1943 Key Misc. Facts:

- During his stay at Pueblo AAB, CO, it is believed he met his future war bride and married at Houston Texas, 9 August 1942.
- Received Dear John letter in late July, and spent August flying local VIP flights. He requested and received immediate transfer from Squadron Operations to Combat Pilot August 25, 1943.
- Lt Nauman then flew every mission and usually flew the fatal "Tail Charlie" position.
- Clark Gable spoke of this incident in a TV interview once about Clarks experience in the war and was visibly shaken by the event.
- Interesting tid bit: One day Lt Nauman (Dan) was seen going around the base looking for a box that he could feed with oxygen so he could take his cat on missions with him (RE: Orland). (NOTE: We do not know where the cat was Oct 4, 1943 at 12:22... but probably manning its position in the cockpit).
- Pilots Lt Nauman and Lt Nardi came in for a landing with a full load of armed bombs and an engine out only to discover a flat tire when they touch down, which is usually fatal. They managed to keep the heavy B17 on the runway & not lose it. It became known as "Dam Landing" and "Dam good Pilots" (Re: Orland) (Photo).

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Mission 45 4 Oct 43 Frankfurt:

- After mission 29 July 1943 Lt Nauman must have received the Dear John Letter as he flew only Local flights during August. Lt Nauman who was scheduled to be Flight Commander in 2 weeks, requested transfer 30 Aug to full time flight combat duty and starting 6 Sept he put together a crew and flew every mission, sometimes with orphan crew members... it was suicide as the crew were not used to working with one another together in perfect coordination to protect the plane from enemy fighters.
- A swarm of 100+ Luftwaffe fiercely attacked his B-17 over the Frankfurt propeller factory and received heavy fire from enemy fighters that shot him up pretty bad and he lost an engine at 11:01.
- Another heavy fighter attack 15 minutes after target Nauman and Strouse both got hit and lost engines and took crew casualties.
- Lt Nauman had a malfunction and never dropped his bombs at target. The extra weight plus losing an engine after target caused him to lose speed and altitude and fall out of formation to the left.
- Pilot & Witness Lt Strouse was shot in the foot, lost #4 engine, and had his bomb bay doors stuck open saw Nauman's plane losing altitude and several chutes pop open just before Lt Nauman disappeared into the clouds.
- This was about 20-30 min before fighter escort at the Belgium boarder (air speed 150mph). This is corroborated with a 2nd witness (Navigator Lt Orlyn Master) who tried to give Lt Nauman a 187 degree heading to go to Sweden. This puts the expected parachute drop zone 5 miles East of Friedberg to 15 miles west of Friedberg Germany, which is 16 miles North West of Frankfurt in a heavily wooded forest.
- Lt Strouse was able to maintain 150 mph with the formation by running his 3 good engines wide open which used a lot more fuel than he had to make it home, and thusly throttled back once he had fighter escort to conserve fuel.
- The full load of bombs and loss of #2 & perhaps #1 engine prevented Dan from staying with group another 15 minutes like Strouse who was able to get fighter escort before dropping out of the group formation.
- The crew that bailed out over a dense forest disappeared never to be heard from again.
- If they could have waited 15 minutes before jumping... they would have crossed the Belgium boarder and most likely would have fallen into "Underground Resistance Fighters" (URF) and been smuggled back to friendly forces (the URF had well established Escape & Evade routes and systems).
- From all indications... Lt Nauman followed the scenario of what happens when you loose 2 engines. You can keep the plane airborne below a thousand feet, unless you have other damage. But if in question... you have the crew jump, and in this case several that were still alive jumped (you have to be alive to pull the rip cord).
- He may have lost oxygen also, and had to go to low altitude.
- He limped his badly damage B-17 with 2 engines out to the coast 230 miles away under an altitude of 1-2,000 feet or a lot lower either by necessity or by choice as he flew low enough to avoid enemy Flak Radar and the terrible flak batteries that were along the flight path that battered the rest of his formation non-stop along the way.
- The main BG flew 4-7 miles more south of the deadly flak batteries at Vlissingen.
- The German Flak Battery Report at Vlissingen: *"12:22... low flying aircraft over the Schelde... fired 48 shot 10.5 cm, 61 shot 3.7 cm, and 241 shot 2 cm. The aircraft got a 10.5 cm direct hit and falls burning out of the sky about 5 km SE of Vlissingen into the Schelde, the crew did not survive!"*
- Lt Nauman's B-17 took a Flak hit on its right side just behind the wing, causing enough damage to cause the plane to make a fairly steep controlled dive into the water causing a big splash (re: Witness DG).
- 2 bodies washed up on the Vlissingen shore a week later, and a third was later found in an unmarked grave.
- Pilots tell me Lt Nauman had to have very serious problems for an experienced pilot like him to fly low over the water straight into the deadly flak batteries at Vlissingen. There is one explanation... his instruments were shot up and he was flying VFR (by sight) following the river. There were also low clouds that day that would have kept him low.
- A Pilot colonel told me that when he flew his B-17 full throttle on 2 engines that at 1hr 20 minutes his engines were at the melting point and at 1hr 40 minutes his engines melted and he crashed. Lt Nauman was at 1:30 minutes. I think Lt Nauman was very dedicated to bring the plane home at all cost... plus after receiving the Dear John letter it appears he no longer cared about his life.
- 3 other planes flew low over the same area that day and all three escaped Flak damage. Some never got fired on.
- The Life expectancy of a crew was 15 missions... Lt Nauman was on his 17th.

Lt Nauman did an incredible job keeping his aircraft flyable those 230 miles. It must have been quite an adventure and tale that we will never know. He told my dad if he ever got hit he would try and get the crew to safe haven or have them bail out, and he would try to bring the plane home. He almost made it by 4 miles (2 minutes) and the very last Flak Battery.

Interesting Facts:

- 2 planes in the 6 plane 511th squadron aborted because of sick crew or low oil pressure that were directly ahead of Nauman there by losing protective fire power coverage of the planes in the Tail Charlie & Purple Heart position. (2 planes in the 7 plane 508th also aborted sick). Dan was left wide open in the far left rear “Tail Charlie Position”.
- Loss of one engine and Bomb Drop Malfunction... and loss of 2nd engine or other severe problems.
- He was flying a Vega built ship... a faster ship which could fly 220mph w/4 engines, and could fly on 2 engines for 1.5 hrs.
- Another aircraft was shot down about 5 minutes before Nauman’s crew bailed out in the same area and crew was KIA/POW.
- Reports that the Right waist gunner SSgt (*Name on file*) would freeze up and not shoot, or not take oxygen to other crew that was out... he would just freeze. Normally that kind of crew was grounded.
- Early on Lt Nauman flew once as co-pilot for Lt (*Name on file*), who wrote that when he caught up with Dan’s 14 missions that he would carry on where Dan left off. Lt (*Name on file*) should have easily had his 25 missions in... but he had a record of aborting for any reason for minor discrepancies in his aircraft real or not, like oxygen pressure that was normally 10 lbs low in the nose, or bogus low oil pressure. No wonder he wrote Dan’s mom... he probably had guilt a concise for not covering him that day.
- Lt Nauman’s crew that jumped 20 miles from Frankfurt? Most Probable: (1) Landed in the woods and got killed or hung up on the trees and are still there. (2) Ground troops shot them. (3) Caught by the Gestapo, tortured and executed.
- Crewman Robert Martin bought a small woman’s watch inscribed with a special custom inscription before going overseas only to have the watch show up in his mother’s mail box long after his plane went down with no note or nothing, and having come into the country by the smugglers route El Paso, TX. Update: Re: Resistance/Underground would have done anything for air men and had just such a system in place to do such a thing. So what happened? Most Probable: Martin and the evader helpers were caught by the Gestapo, tortured and killed for underground info and buried in an unmarked grave in the dead of night (that was the norm).
- Robert Martin went two missions over and was on his 27th so he could go home with a buddy (“Hunter” who was on his 25th).
- Report from mother of Foy Rush that he showed up at his former MT. employer (Ranch Hand) about a year later and talked to other employees to see if he could get his old job back, and then he disappears apparently forever. Not impossible, and easy to get on a merchant ship heading to America.
- Orlyn got drunk one night with Clark Gable. (I have a feeling Dan did too after the break-up).
- Clark Gable and his Cameraman flew with Lt Nauman. Lt Nauman was in several parts of Clark Gable’s movie “Combat America”. After the KIA, most of those shots with Lt Nauman in them were cut out. One, a key role with Lt Nauman getting out of a jeep was cut out (1 frame was left in by mistake) because Clark in an interview later reflected how a war bride could really mess up a Pilot and good friend with a Dear John letter and Clark broke down at that point with tears in his eyes. He was referring to Dan. Good friends they should be... Dan was ops Officer and got Clark on missions and flew as his pilot.
- Evidence points to Dan meeting his Bride to be when he was at Pueblo AAF by Colorado Springs at the Broadmoor Hotel that had special prices for the uniformed set including the nurses in training from Ft Carson. We know (*name on file*) lived in Colorado Springs and was training to be a Hospital Lab Technician. (Re Polebrook Post Vol. XXXIV #2. Spring 2014.
- Lt Nauman flew most VIP’s that visited the Base including USO show people. You name them... they signed his Short Sorters’.

Dutch researchers, Media and TV specials, and other people have come forward with information including a still alive witness who was a little girl of twelve in 1943 stood in her father’s freighter wheel house and witnessed the final shooting down of Lt Nauman’s B-17, and where it crashed (her memory and vivid description is as fresh as if it had just happen yesterday).

My Netherlands & German research friends have located the German Luftwaffe flight list, kill reports, and rare German code grid maps and I have scoured though hundreds of reports and narrowed it down to 6 possible pilots. Unfortunately most Luftwaffe pilots and their full Kill Reports did not survive the war. Germans were good at documentation; their reports should have solved some mysteries. One griping interesting account from that day of another B-17 kill was by a dedicated German pilot doing his duty for his country.

Thanks to German & Dutch Flak Reports, and the vivid recollection of a then 12 year old witness, we now have a 4 point triangulation to the crash location. Its final resting place on the bottom remains a mystery at this date due to currents and other factors... but it’s there... somewhere... waiting for its secrets to be discovered.

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