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THE ORIGINAL CREW OF "SHOOT LUKE"

PILOT- - - - - JOHN H. MURPHY
CO-PILOT- - - - - -FRANK D. IOWN
NAVIGATOR- - - - - ARCH J. RANTALA
BOMBARDIER- - - - - -ED P. JANIC
ENGINEER- - - - - -ARVILE D. SIRMANS
RADIO OPERATOR- - - - - -WILLIAM D. MERCER
TAIL GUNNER- - - - - PAUL B. SLANKARD
R. WAIST GUNNER- - - - - MAHLON W. CRESSEY
L. WAIST GUNNER- - - - - FLOYD H. MABBE
TUNNEL GUNNER- - - - - JAMES D. COWAN

This story is dedicated to nine heroes, by one guy who was lucky enough to fly with all of them. It is a story, not only of a super ship, but of a super bunch of guys - the same as any other bunch of guys that are fighting this war all over the world.

JOHN H. MURPHY



As far as our crew were concerned the story of "LUKE" begins on August 17, 1942. For it was that day that crew #4 of 328th Squadron Group were told that their ship was arriving at the field where the Group was making final preparations before pulling out for service over seas. It was a restless crew that sat around the "Operations Office" that day but along about mid-afternoon the members of the crew were told that their ship had just landed and that they were to go out and give it a preliminary check. (They weren't told that the Ferry Pilot who had brought the ship in had stated that he, "Was sure glad to get out of that thing, it's a Jinx Ship"). One of the first problems confronting the crew of this ship was to find a name for it. Several were suggested but none seemed to satisfy the fellows. During this part of our stay in the states one of the chief pastimes was the pleasant diversion of rolling the dice and the expression "SHOOT LUKE, YOU'RE FADED" was a very common one around the barracks. Eventually one of the crew suggested "SHOOT LUKE" would be a good name for the ship.

The field had an artist available who specialized in designs for planes and when the crew explained to him what they wanted he came through with a picture that met with the instant approval of each crew member. So from then on crew #4 and "SHOOT LUKE" were inseparable.

Nothing exciting occurred for the remainder of our stay in the states, except it was there we had our last steak but that is just one of the more pleasant memories connected with our last base in the states. On September 5th the Group left the U.S. For all of us it was quite an experience, to be flying and as you looked down to see the U. S. fading away in the haze and to realize that some of the cheerful, happy, carefree fellows would never see that land again. At the time however all of us were too excited about our coming trip and the prospects of at last really getting into the fight to care about anything else.

We ran into some bad weather and were delayed for four days, but at 6:30 P.M. on September 9th we took off for the Trans-Atlantic trip. "LUKE" was leading the mass formation flight with 17 planes following. The take-off was normal and we soon headed out to sea. The wing ships made a beautiful picture against the flaming red of the sunset, and this time the coast line fading away was our last glimpse of America (for this was not the U.S.A.). Shortly after dark we began to hit bad weather again. We tried to climb above it. As we went up the thermometer went down and at about 12,000 feet we began to pick up some ice on the wings and props. (The ice flying off the props and hitting the fuselage sounded like gun fire). This icing condition only lasted for a short while and everything seemed alright again. But this wasn't a good night for crew #4. The Navigator became ill and his oxygen system had frozen up, so between administering first aid to him (he was almost frozen), and worrying about our course and the weather, it was anything but a dull trip. The wind was a good bit stronger than had been predicted and as a result dawn found us North of our course, however, our landfall was made and exactly eight hours and fifteen minutes after leaving America we were in Britain.

One of the strangest sights of the war was to see crew #4 trying to order breakfast (porridge, powdered eggs, fat bacon and tea), and

then to change our American dollars into pounds, shillings and pence. Our breakfast finally finished, had left much to be desired, but we were in a hurry to get Luke to his new home, so after a short stretch we got back into the ship and took off for our new Base in Britain.

For nearly a month crew #4 and Luke sat around doing a little flying, then suddenly we were awakened one morning and told to report to the briefing room, when they told us that our practice days were over and that this was our first real show. This was October 9th and the target was Lille, France. As soon as the briefing was over the crew rushed to the ship to give everything a last minute check. The Group took off and Luke was acting like a honey. We flew around England for a while getting our altitude. After what seemed an eternity we headed East to France. Just as we got to the French Coast the Bombardier called to say that our Navigator was sick and that it was suicide to go into Combat with him in that condition. We had a hurried talk over the interphone and then we saw that there was nothing to do but turn Luke around and go home. It almost broke the hearts of the crew when they headed back for England and saw the remainder of the Group continuing into enemy territory. We began to wonder about the Ferry Pilot. The crew made a solemn resolution that never again would they let the rest of the Group go in without them (and from then on they never did). When the other ships and crews returned they told of flak like huge clouds and fighters in swarms, some of the ships had been shot to hell, but Luke was so far a virgin: not for too long.

The next raid the Group was on was Brest. Luke was in the thick of one and for the first time over the target he pitched a rough one. The flak was heavy and accurate and the fighters were persistent to say the least. It was on this one that Luke sustained his first damage - a piece of flak broke the plexi glass in the nose and just missed the Bombardier's head (by less than six inches). Aside from that nothing happened except that one of the gunners got the first "Probable".

The next raid was on St. Nazaire (more Sub-Marine installations), bombing results were good, and Luke got some more holes in him - again nothing serious.

Our next raid was on Lorient, and on this one a volley of three flak shells exploded under Luke's left wing - almost turning him upside down. However, luckily we sustained no more damage other than several holes in the wing. On the way home we were attacked by JU. 88's and for forty-five minutes we had a running fight which ended when our tail gunner scored first blood for Luke when he shot one down and saw it burst into flames and crash into the sea (that was the first Swastika to be painted on the nose of Luke). We made one more trip to Lorient before we received the news one afternoon in early December that we were heading for a ten day stay in a warmer climate.

December 7th 1942 found us flying from England headed for Africa, to us it was an amazing thing that we could have breakfast in England and lunch in Africa, (and I might mention that the Africa in the story books isn't the same Africa we saw-all we found was mud, dirty Natives,

and an awful smell-and more mud.

From our North African Base we bombed Bizerta twice in two days with excellent results. The first time we received a few flak holes, and the second time the fighters gave us a bad time, but so far nobody had been hurt, except a few "Jerries".

The middle of December we took off one night at mid-night and flew East till dawn, at which time Luke had a change of diet, from mud to sand, we had arrived at our base in the Libian Dessert. The field where we sat Luke down was a strip of desert that the "Jerries" had just vacated. Christmas Eve found the crew of Luke gathered around a camp fire on the middle of the desert, singing Christmas Carols and drinking Canadian Club (we didn't ask how it got there, it was there and that was enough for us). A more unusual Christmas Eve, I never hope to spend.

On December 31st we bombed Sfax in what was one of the Group's most successful raids. Every bomb hit a vital military target and it was a good way to end up the old year. On the way home we listened to the B. B. C. (British Broadcasting Company), and sang "Old Lang Syne" with them.

Dust storms that lasted for three days set in and made life miserable all concerned, even Luke looked strange with a coat of dust all over the outside and inside of him (it's in this type of weather that the Liberator will continue to operate and the almighty Fortress will bog down and cause nothing but grief, but I'm telling the story of a ship and a crew, not trying to start another war). The wind at times would reach 45 - 50 miles per hour and several of those who went to bed in a hut woke up with just the stars for a roof.

On January 5th while on a raid to Souse, Luke was hit by a piece of flak about the size of a cigar that went between the legs of one of the gunners - Close! The man has it for a souvenir. Aside from a few holes that did no real damage we still continued to operate without injury.

As was our custom while on the desert, we would go raiding one day, rest and do maintenance on the ships the next day and then go out raiding the following day.

On January 7th we went to Palermo (on Luke's 13th mission) we climbed to altitude (over 22,000') where it was 46° C., and stayed there for three and one half hours, at the end of which time we had to administer first aid to some of the men, the worst of which was our tail gunner (he had nearly frozen to death in the tail turret), but on our way home we made some hot coffee on the heaters and he soon came around alright. We received no damage to the ship on this raid even tho we were attacked by som "Wop" fighters, (they broke off their attack even before they were within shooting range of us). Despite the cold, the ship functioned perfectly and the more we flew in it, the better we liked it.

Shortly after this, Luke took crew #4 to a town on the Suez Canal for a much needed bath (there were no facilities for a bath on the desert and not enough water besides, so the only chance we "Desert Rats" had to get cleaned up was to fly over 500 miles to where people lived like human beings). We were rationed to one canteen of water a day! While in Egypt all of the crew bought all sorts of Souvenirs including a Native puppy, we naturally named "Luke" (even if she was the only female on the crew).

On our return to our Base we took "Shoot Luke" down near the Pyramids, where we flew around looking at the Nile, Cairo, the Sphinx and all the Pyramids-also we all were taking pictures of this sight that we'll always remember. When we returned to our Base it was almost dark, after we'd put "Luke" to bed the "Jerries" thought that we might be lonesome, so they paid us a call and as a result we spent the better part of the night in our slit trenches-the British night fighter Pilots shot down two of the six that came over-which helped a good deal.

"Luke" next had a chance to see how tough the flak was over Tripoli, and through that he came out fine, no hits, no runs and no errors. However the next time he went out he wasn't so lucky for the next one was January 19th and the target was Sousse, nothing much happened over the target, but when we headed for home, after dropping our bombs the fighters attacked and all hell broke loose. One F.W. 190 got through the guns of our formation and put a burst into "Luke" (four 20 M.M. explosive cannon shells and half a dozen machine gun bullets tore into "Luke's" wing's and fuselage.) The cannon shells severed 8 spars and made 2 ribs look like a piece of cheese cloth and blew the skin away from the spars and ribs underneath (destroying the air foil characteristics). One cannon shell lodged in the fuel cells and started them smouldering, another cannon shell penetrated the control cabin and blew up wounding two men badly and damaging the hydraulic system and radio. Note: Damage to the plane is all I'm telling about here, for details of the men concerned please see the radio script that my Mother has. The badly damaged plane limped into Malta with the wing in very bad shape and three fuel cells smouldering--it was here we really appreciated the wonderful work done by Consolidated workers. We landed and the Maltese began hacking away on the wing, in order to make a hole so that they could get inside the wing and put the fire out. The fuel cells that were smouldering were extinguished--the wounded taken to the hospital and the ship left till morning. The preliminary diagnosis figured that it was a four day job to repair "Luke", but a week later they were still tearing the wing apart and hadn't begun repairing, finally all the ragged edges were cleaned up and re-building began (there were no power tools available so all the work was done by hand, including the cutting and riveting or over 3,000 rivets. Not to mention the strengthening of the ribs and the splicing of the spars.) The Crew of "Luke" helped as much as possible, but the six Maltese that had been detailed for the job were working twelve hours a day in order to get the job done. For a while we thought that they never would quit tearing down and start to build, but on February 5th we were told that tomorrow "Luke" would be ready once again to get up in the air. On the original test flight we took at least thirty people for a ride. All the

Maltese who had done any work on the ship wanted a ride, and when we said that they could come on the test flight they jumped at the chance (and then they all went out and united their friends). When we landed I was thanked by at least ten people I know I never said could come along. The afternoon of February 6th found "Luke" on the way to the Middle East with his wounded aboard and Malta fading with the distance.

They say that there is no rest for the wicked and so it proved in our case, for within a week "Luke" was on his way over Naples where crew #4 heard the harps calling again. Two turrets froze and we didn't know it till we were attacked by fighters (we were under attack by fighters for one hour and fifteen minutes and extremely accurate Flak was bursting around us continually, for fifteen minutes.) One fighter closed to within fifty feet of the tail of "Luke" and just sat there - the tail gunner waved his guns around (but couldn't fire because the terrific cold had frozen them) and the Italian Pilot waved his hand in front of his nose, finally the fighter pulled up and one of the other ships in our formation shot him down (to this day this is a constant source of argument to us and we frequently discuss our opinion as to just why this guy didn't shoot us down). I know that this was one of the most nerve racking times of my life and the other fellows say that they felt the same way. There were several times that day when I looked out and saw the sky red with tracers (and they weren't ours either - the Italians were sitting back and literally spraying our formation with bullets.) When we got home you may be able to understand how amazed we were when we discovered that the total damage sustained by "Luke" was two tiny Flak holes causing no damage.

That was the last thing of any importance that happened to us while we were in the Middle East - the next close call happened on our return to North Africa.

The later part of February we were briefed and took off at two A.M. for North Africa, the weather forecast was good weather when we arrived so we "poured on the coal" and made the Base after about eight hours only to find that it was "socked in" solid and so was all our alternate airport. We cruised around for awhile after figuring that we only had gas enough to last for one hour. After flying for forty-five minutes and calling the tower only to find that the field was still solidly closed in. We decided to "belly" "Luke" in, it meant the loss of our ship, but we couldn't stay up for ever, so we started down for a big green field that we saw down below. Just as we were starting on our approach to the field we decided to have one more last try at the field (this particular field is surrounded on three sides by mountains that reach up to 4,000 ft. in some places.) There was a ceiling at 100 ft. and we got under it, flying right over peoples houses and farms - scaring hell out of them. Just as we were about to give up hope, we saw another B-24 flying off to one side - we headed for it and as we did we saw the runway almost that quickly. When we landed we discovered that many of the fellows had been in the same predicament, but by a miracle we had no losses of personnel (some of the fellows in order to lighten their ships had thrown guns over-board, one crew even "salvoed" a crate of eggs.) I have never felt more relieved about anything in all my life than I was when we felt the landing gear hit and began to roll along that runway.

After a night spent in North Africa we flew to Gibraltar where we stayed for a few hours before taking off again for Britain.

Our trip back was un-eventful, but it was certainly good to get back and see all of the fellows we'd left behind. We saw to it that the ground crew gave "Luke" a much needed overhaul, while we gave ourselves the same in London.

It wasn't long before we were out operating again, against targets in France, Belgium and Holland, all of these were tough but nothing spectacular till the day we hit the biggest of the big leagues-a raid on Germany, we knew that it was going to be tough but how tough we had no idea.

Let me say here that Frank Lown had left the crew (he now had one of his own) a fellow named George Black had taken over as Co-Pilot on "Luke" and this was George's first raid. The trip was uneventful until we reached our altitude about 50 miles off the German coast-from then on we were under constant fighter attack for one hour and forty-five minutes, our run into the target was a good one (one gunner had already accounted for three fighters) and the bombing results were excellent, we turned away from the target and headed for home. The fighters by now were really getting warmed up and at one time a mass attack developed in which about thirty enemy fighters attack our nine ship element, one of these hit the #4 engine on Frank's ship (our ex-Co-Pilot) and blew a large hole in the vertical stabilizer. We saw that Frank was in trouble and told the gunners to keep an eye on him so far he was still in formation. Next the twin-engined fighters (J.U. 88's M.E. 110's and 210's) took us on, they were slower than the single engined boys and it was more nerve racking as their attacks were slower and took longer to complete and break away, just as you'd think they couldn't shoot any more they'd skid their ship so that they could get in a longer burst at us. Finally these too left and as far as we knew we were on our way home, then Frank's #4 engine began to smoke and vibrate very badly, and he had to drop out of formation, we held a hurried conversation on the inter-phone and all of us voted to go help him home. We left the formation and took up a position off his wing-- suddenly out of nowhere reared one lonely F.W. 190, he looked us over and came in on an attack from 9 o'clock low with his four cannon and machine guns firing. There was a sudden explosion and I knew that we had been hit by cannon and machine gun fire. I glanced over at George and at first I thought that he had been hit, but he soon looked at me and I saw that he was O.K., even if three slugs had missed his head by less than eighteen inches. The fighters had hit us with two cannon shells and about six machine gun slugs, the cannon shells had both hit the rear part of the ship where they had exploded, one fragment going into T/Sgt. Floyd Mabbe's eye and causing him several other very painful wounds-- in spite of this he remained at his post and not only continued to fire his guns, but he shot down the fighter that had hit us. S/Sgt. Paul B. Siskard was in the rear turret when the fighter attacked and as soon as it was over he called up to tell me that he had been hit too, when I asked him how bad, he said "pretty bad, I think my leg is broken." We tried to send someone back to him only to find that the Radio Operator, the Co-Pilot and I were the only men on the ship that hadn't been wounded. When we finally were able to get Paul out of the turret it was only to discover that his left leg had almost been blown off by the cannon shell that had penetrated his left buttock and then exploded, it was only

Blown Through Flying Bomber's Turret Gunner Saved by Pal from Lafayette

WASHINGTON (AP)—Blasted through the top of the tail turret by a direct hit from a 20-mm. Nazi cannon, Staff Sgt. Paul B. Slankard, 23, flew for interminable minutes 22,500 feet above Germany, with the upper half of his body protruding from a Liberator bomber.

Slankard, multi-decorated flyer from Memphis, Tenn., told the story today at Walter Reed Hospital, where he is recovering from his experience.

Only the fact that his left foot caught in the gun controls saved him from being shot, projectile-fashion, completely through the turret roof.

Forced Into His Side

Slankard was weakened from an impact so intense it imbedded the contents of a pocket deep in his left hip.

"I tried to crawl back into the turret, but the winds were too strong," Slankard said. "It was like a tug of war with the suction of the whipstream trying to

pull me free from the plane. I couldn't fight it."

Then Tech. Sgt. Floyd H. Mabee of Lafayette, N. J., waist gunner, one of the six crew members wounded by the same German fighter, crawled to Slankard's rescue.

"Mabee pulled me back in the ship," Slankard recounted. "He slapped an auxiliary oxygen mask over my face."

Placed Over Hole in Ship

With Lt. Edmund J. Janic, Milwaukee, Wis., the bombardier, Mabee covered Slankard's wound with sulfanilamide powder and dragged the tail gunner to a hole in the plane's side.

"They had to stop the bleeding somehow," Slankard explained. "They shoved me in a position so the wound would be against



Sgt. Mabee

Wounds Scaled by 4 Below Zero Cold

the hole and the frigid air on side would seal the veins.

"It's 40 to 50 degrees below zero up there, you know. We never been told to do that. I first aid, but you hit on ideas like that when it's a case of life or death."

There were no narcotics to ease Slankard's pain. The hypodermic needles were frozen and effort of his crewmates to thaw them their mouths proved futile.

"I lay there for two hours an 45 minutes until we reached England," Slankard continued. "Mabee and Janic massaged my hand to keep the circulation going."

That was last March 18 right after Slankard had got his title Nazi plane in a few minute time on a bombing mission over submarine installations at Vegesack, Germany. Those three downed Nazi fighters brought Slankard's total to 11 planes shot down and six or eight probable. Slankard now is undergoing series of operations to restore flesh and function to his wounded hip.

Newark Evening News
Published Oct. 14, 1943

This I added to Capt. Murphy's story about
The Original crew of "Shoot Luke"
My mother found this in the Newark Evening
News Oct 14, 1943

This I added to Capt.
Murphy's story about
The Original Crew of 'Shoot
Luke'. This was sent to
my mother taken from
The Pittsburgh Press 1943

Saved by Trapped Foot—

Blown Half Out of Bomber, Flier Lives to Tell Tale

Impact Imbeds Pockets' Contents in Hip; Sub
Zero Air Stems Bleeding in Wounds

WASHINGTON, Oct. 14 (UP)—Staff Sgt. Paul B. Slankard, 23-year-old multi-decorated patient at Walter Reed Hospital, has a story he can tell the youngsters of tomorrow—if they can take it.

Blasted through the top of his tail gunner's turret by a direct hit from a 20 mm. Nazi cannon, Sgt. Slankard flew for interminable minutes 22,500 feet above Germany with the upper half of his body protruding from a Liberator bomber.

Only the fact that his left foot caught in the gun controls saved him from being shot, projectile-fashion, through the turret roof. The impact was so intense that it imbedded the contents of Sgt. Slankard's pocket deep in his left hip.

"I tried to crawl back into the turret, but the winds were too strong," he said. "It was like a tug of war, with the suction of the whiplash trying to pull me free from the plane. I couldn't fight it."

Then Sgt. Floyd H. Mabey, of Lafayette, N. J., waist gunner, one

of the six crew members wounded by the same German fielder crawled to Sgt. Slankard's rescue. "Mabey pulled me back in the ship," Sgt. Slankard recounted. "He slapped an auxiliary oxygen mask over my face."

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"They had to stop the bleeding somehow," Sgt. Slankard explained. "They shined me in position so the wound would be against the hole."

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1943

THE PITTSBURGH PRESS, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1943

Last Blows Flier Through His Turret

(Continued From Page One)

and the frigid air outside would seal the veins.

40 Below Zero

"It's 40 to 50 degrees below zero up there, you know. We'd never been told to do that in first aid, but you hit on ideas like that when it's a case of life and death."

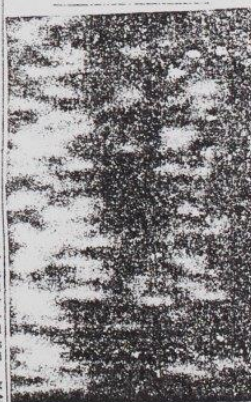
There were no narcotics to ease Sgt. Slankard's pain. The hypodermic needles were frozen and all efforts of his crewmates to thaw them in their mouths proved futile.

"I lay there for two hours and 45 minutes until we reached England," Sgt. Slankard continued. "Mabey and Janic massaged my hands to keep the circulation going."

That was last March 18, right after Sgt. Slankard got three Nazi planes on a bombing mission over submarine installations at Vegesack, Germany. Those three downed Nazi fighters brought Sgt. Slankard's total to 11 planes shot down and six or eight probables.

Sgt. Slankard now is undergoing a series of operations to restore

him. A native of Memphis, Tenn., he was graduated from Memphis Tech High School. Before entering the service he worked as an insulator in Tampa, Fla., where his wife, Nell Kathryn, now lives.



through the outstanding job of first aid performed by the Bombardier, Ed Janic that Paul was kept from bleeding to death. In spite of severe and painful face and head wounds Janic crawled to the rear of the ship to administer first aid to Paul and the other three men back there (all four men in the rear of the ship had been wounded by the exploding cannon shells) after which Janic came up on the flight deck where he fainted from loss of blood pain and shock. Mantala, the Navigator although wounded remained at his post and successfully navigated the two ships home where we landed and our crew alone filled the ambulance. When Frank landed he came over to each one of us and thanked us for saving his crew from certain destruction, but all of us knew that had the positions been reversed he would have done exactly as we did.

I'd like to say now that Paul went to the hospital more dead than alive, and for awhile it was touch and go, but when he got started on the road to recovery he fairly flew. If you ask a Doctor he'll tell you it is impossible but never the less Paul is up and around today and just as tough as ever (in fact he says he'd like to go and fight the Jap's with me--and we're going too.) His case has made medical history and is going to be one of the most famous medical cases in the war.

In less than two weeks "Luke" with a patched up crew was out in the lead again, to "Rotterdam and Antwerp, these were fairly easy and neither "Luke" nor the crew sustained any damage.

On the week-end of my birthday our crew broadcast to the states the story of the Sousse raid of January 19th.

Our next raid was the worse I have ever been on--for awhile we were bombing Brest, Frank Lown was shot down, although "Luke" was hit by one 20 M.M. cannon shell that missed the tail gunner by about three inches we were unhurt, till we got home and realized that Frank had gone down. It was a down hearted crew that sat around for several nights.

However, in less than a month I had received a postcard from Frank through the Red Cross, written in a German concentration camp saying that he was alright. So all of us are looking forward to seeing him again one of these days before very long.

The last time I was with "Luke" on a raid was in May--when we bombed Bordeaux. The raid was an easy one and when we slipped out of the ship I knew that I was saying so long to the grandest ship and crew a pilot was ever lucky enough to be connected with, for crew #4 was the most decorated crew in the E.T.O. (European Theater of Operations.) When I left the ship George Black took over and he now is the Commander of "Shoot Luke" who the day I left him was proudly wearing 29 Bombs and 13 Swastika's (each bomb represents a mission, and each Swastika represents one less "Jerry").

At the present time "Luke" is giving "Jerry" just as much trouble and just as bad a time as he ever used to, and I only hope that we (the ship and the crew) will meet again someday.

"Luke" has to date bombed targets in France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Tunisia, Sicily, Tripolitania and Germany.

"Shoot Luke" failed to return from a diversion Oct 18, 1943. Lt. Charles R. Hotelens Pilot.