

AERONAUTICS

Find Strayed Bomber

The discovery of a B-24, crash-landed in the Libyan desert during World War II, presents a mystery to Air Force sleuths who are trying to learn why and how the crash occurred.

THE RADIO compass aboard the World War II bomber, the "Lady Be Good," should have told the plane's crewmen that they had safely returned home from their first bombing mission. Instead, they crash-landed.

Discovered early in May, 16 years later, in the Libyan desert, the abandoned B-24's radio compass was still in perfect working order despite the crash, the U.S. Air Force reported.

As the plane and its crew of nine passed over their comrades at the operational base at Soluch, Libya, on the night of April 4, 1943, the plane's radio compass needle should have spun around 180 degrees indicating that "home" was now in the direction of the plane's tail, not its nose.

The tragic story of what happened to 25 bombers charged with bombing Naples harbor has now been pieced together by Air Force Capt. Dennis E. McClendon.

Twenty-five unescorted bombers were to assault Naples harbor. These were arranged in two sections, A and B. They were to hit the target at high altitude at dusk, break formation, and slip back to Soluch individually at lower altitude under cover of darkness.

To reach Naples at dusk, the planes began taking off at 1:30 p.m. on April 4 in a blinding sandstorm. Section A promptly lost one plane because of engine and supercharger troubles aggravated by the sandstorm. The other 11 planes hit the target and returned safely.

Section B, containing a new B-24 (the "Lady Be Good") flown by First Lt. William J. Hatton, the plane recently found, became airborne between 1:45 and 1:50 p.m.

Only four planes flew near the target, and only three of these returned safely.

As a result of defective superchargers and engines, oil leaks and gas leaks, only six of 13 planes remained in Section B. By 7:30 p.m., the waist gunners' oxygen masks had frozen in two of the planes, and the gunners blacked out. By diving to revive the gunners, the pilots of both planes lost the formation and went home.

The "Lady Be Good" then apparently assumed lead of the remaining four planes, which reached Sorrento, about 30 miles south of Naples, at about 7:50 p.m. The sun had been down for 15 minutes at the 25,000 foot altitude, apparently too dark to bomb the target. The planes broke formation and headed back to Soluch under orders to maintain absolute radio silence.

One plane landed on the British island of Malta, low on fuel, at 10:45 p.m. Another made it back to Soluch at 10:45 p.m. A third landed at 11:10 p.m. An hour and two minutes later, the Benina, Libya, radio direction finder station spotted Lt. Hatton's B-24 over the Mediterranean Sea headed back on a bearing of 330 degrees. The plane was exactly on course for Soluch, but no one knows why it was so late.

Apparently, the Air Force said, Lt. Hatton continued watching for the coastline but missed seeing it in the hazy darkness. With three of the plane's engines out of gas and the fourth drinking its last few pints, the crew parachuted into the Libyan desert at a point from which there could be no escape by foot.

Search parties, still combing the area, have found a 50-mile trail marked with strips of

parachute. They hope to find further evidence of the crew's ultimate fate.

There are several circumstances that help explain the Lady Be Good's erratic behavior.

This was the crew's first combat flight. The sandstorm which occurred as the planes took off on their bombing mission possibly affected the plane's engines.

The Lady Be Good's pilot may, in the darkness, have mistaken the desert sands for ocean. This could explain the plane's position. Since the weather was hazy, it is possible that, discounting the radio compass, Lt. Hatton could have flown over the coastline and missed identifying it.

The plane crashed on a sand and gravel plateau about 500 feet above sea level. Seventy miles to the north, and in a "U" shape around the plane is the impassable Libyan Sand Sea. To the south, 100 miles, is a 2,300-foot mountain range which seals off the south of the "U" shape. It is apparently impossible to escape the plateau either by foot or on camelback. Air Force officials report that desert nomads never visit the land.

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MEDICINE

Puffing Out Match Is Sure-Fire Medical Test

FOUR MICHIGAN DOCTORS have evolved a sure-fire bedside medical test—blowing out a lighted book match.

This simple huff-and-puff technique can be used to measure the seriousness of blockage in the airway of a patient suffering from pulmonary diseases.

These patients usually present signs of airway obstruction by wheezing and taking a long time to breathe air out of their lungs, the team explains in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Aug. 1).

But these bedside signs do not give the doctor the necessary information required to determine the patient's respiratory function. It is usually evaluated by two rather complicated tests that require the use of mechanical devices which cannot always be brought to a bedside.

The doctors gave the match test to 126 patients with various pulmonary diseases. Then they gave the two standard tests, correlating the results of the three tests.

The test itself consists of holding a lighted book match six inches from the mouth of the patient. It is important that the patient blow with his mouth wide open, not with pursed lips, the doctors say.

This simple test proved to be a favorable technique when compared to the results of the two standard tests. It should be used as a screening procedure, indicating whether or not more specific tests of pulmonary function should be performed, Drs. Thomas H. Snider, John P. Stevens, Freeman M. Wilner, and Benjamin M. Lewis of Dearborn's Veterans Administration Hospital, and Wayne State University College of Medicine, Detroit, conclude.

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DOWNED PLANE—The mystery plane, the "Lady Be Good," is examined in her desert hideaway. One engine is still operative. The tracks at the right are of recent origin.