

Speech at the 80th anniversary commemoration of the USAAF B-17G Flying Fortress "Stormy Weather" from the 351st Bomber Group, which crash-landed on Als on May 24, 1944, by Bjørn Allerelli Andersen.

On May 24, 1944, at 2:25 PM, the American bomber aircraft "Stormy Weather" crash-landed 100 meters north of this location in the depression in the field (Skærtøft on Als, near the memorial). The aircraft was a B-17G "Flying Fortress" and belonged to the 351st Bomb Group, 8th U.S. Army Air Force, stationed at Polebrook Air Base in England. On board were the 10 crew members:

- Capt. Robert B. Clay, pilot, Brigham City, Utah
- 1st Lt. Frank Hatten, co-pilot, Ranger, Texas
- 1st Lt. Marshall R. Pullen, navigator, Pittsburg, Texas
- 1st Lt. George W. Arnold, bombardier, Seattle, Washington
- T/Sgt. Charles B. Jilcott, turret gunner, Spokane, Washington
- T/Sgt. Frank H. Belsinger, radio operator, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- S/Sgt. Daniel H. Surprise, left waist gunner, Wichita, Kansas
- S/Sgt. Franklin L. Travis, right waist gunner, Newton, North Carolina
- S/Sgt. Michael De Marie, tail gunner, White Plains, New York
- 1st Lt. James H. Wimmer, tail gunner, Omaha, Nebraska

The mission was to bomb Berlin. "Stormy Weather" led the bomber formation, but unfortunately, only 9 out of the 10 parachutes were transferred—a mistake that would have serious implications for the decisions they would later make during the mission.

After dropping the bombs, I broke formation, Captain Clay recounts in his memoirs, reduced manifold pressure to 34 inches, executed a 180-degree turn, and headed back toward the North Sea coast, avoiding the extra distance to the rendezvous point. The best evasive maneuver at that time was to vary altitude because the German anti-aircraft shells did not have proximity fuses; instead, they exploded after a preset time. Since diving and climbing would separate the formation, the only permitted evasive maneuver from the lead aircraft was gentle horizontal turns. So it was somewhat uplifting to fly back over Berlin alone, performing altitude-evading maneuvers with flak bursting all around and at various altitudes.

After leaving the Berlin area, I transitioned to a fuel-saving slow descent at 110 mph. The 100-mph tailwind we had on the way to the target now became a headwind as we flew back toward England. The bomber formations above and to our right gradually overtook us. By the time we reached the North Sea coastline, we were alone except for a P-51 that dove down, dipped its wing in greeting, and then headed west.

Up until then, I hadn't felt any particular concern about our situation. But now, at 20,000 feet above enemy territory, I felt almost naked and alone. Suddenly, engine #4 (outer right) started running away, and pressing the feathering button had no effect. The situation was serious. With the 100-mph headwind, we were nearly stationary relative to the coastline far below. Months earlier, the crew had voted never to ditch in the North Sea if any possible alternative existed. With that in mind, I paralleled the coastline and flew northeast, hoping we could reach Holland or France before going down. My brain worked overtime to

find options, and I recalled that although Sweden was officially neutral, some bombers that had reached Sweden had somehow been flown back to England. Without a word, I executed a 180-degree turn and asked Lt. Pullen for the course to Sweden. Now with a 100-mph tailwind, I felt somewhat better. Meanwhile, as the airspeed increased, the noise intensified, and the controls tightened. I strained my eyes into the white void ahead, hoping we'd break out of the clouds in time to avoid a crash. The full view came in a flash—the sea just ahead. We were in a 45-degree dive with the wings nearly vertical. I rolled out and zoomed back up to the cloud base at around 4,000 feet over the water.

"Up ahead was water, and behind was land. I had no choice but to make the 180-degree turn back toward land. As we crossed the coastline, I gave the order to bail out. Arnold and Pullen crawled out of the nose and went aft. A minute later, I told Hatten to check the tail of the aircraft. He returned and said that everyone was gone. At that point, we were at about 2,000 feet with the outer left engine pulling a manifold pressure of 44 inches of mercury at 2,300 revolutions per minute, and the plane required strong left rudder and wheel input to prevent it from tipping to the right. I told Hatten to hurry and bail out, and that I would attempt an emergency landing because I couldn't shut down the outer engine at 90 mph without stalling and crashing, and if I simply let go of the controls, the plane would tip over and dive. He replied, 'If it's okay with you, I'd rather make an emergency landing than bail out.' I said, 'Okay, brace yourself.' We were descending so rapidly that the thick bulletproof windshields were cold enough for frost to form on the inside, making it impossible to see straight ahead. So we opened the side windows and peered around the edge of the windshield. The terrain below consisted of rolling forested hills with flat agricultural clearings and houses about every quarter mile in all directions.

With my side window open, I circled left for half a turn, searching for a suitable spot, but there was nothing, and we continued to lose altitude. We soon flew into a wooded valley between two forested hills, and just ahead was a gravel road running between the hills on both sides. I aimed for the top of the road, and just as we passed over it, I stalled the right wing and hit the road. I vaguely remember scraping and banging sounds and flashes of light as we were jolted around. Suddenly, everything was quiet. I could hear birds chirping and the gentle hiss of leaking oxygen tanks. For a moment, I wondered if this was heaven, but as I refocused, I looked over at Hatten. His entire face was covered in blood, and I knew we had survived. The nose of the plane was pointed directly back toward the road we had hit, with the tail next to Hatten's side window. The control cable had pulled the pilot's yoke firmly against my chest. Somehow, I managed to get out of my seat and climb up through the open side window. Hatten could only see faintly, so I helped him out of the plane and led him about 30 meters away. I went back to burn the plane (it was required by regulations to destroy your aircraft in case of an emergency landing) as best I could with the 80 gallons of fuel remaining in the left wing tank. The baseball-sized incendiary charges behind the pilot's seat, designed for just such an occasion, were not there. Quietly, I cursed Wing for delivering such an inadequate plane. (I had noticed before takeoff that the engines had over 200 combat flight hours, which was the usual lifespan for replacing them with refurbished or new engines.) I was determined to try to burn the remnants of the wreck anyway. So I reached into the cockpit and grabbed the Very Pistol and some cartridges. (A Very Pistol is a signal gun used to fire differently colored signals through the cockpit roof to communicate with the formation without breaking radio silence.) I removed the fuel cap from the outer left tank, stepped back, and aimed the pistol at the opening. The double red signal bounced off the wing and floated up over the same road that had caught the right wing. Up until then, I had only been vaguely aware of a group of five or ten adults and children on the road. As the signal light whirled over their heads, they ran screaming in both directions. Now I was truly distressed by the situation. I wanted to burn the remnants of the destroyed

plane, even if the operation could kill me. I loaded another cartridge into the pistol, inserted the barrel into the fuel filler tube, closed my eyes, and pulled the trigger."

"I could hear the signal flare sizzling inside the tank, so I opened my eye, and a blue flame about a foot high lazily emerged from the opening. Unconsciously, I tucked the Very Pistol under my belt and began leading Hatten toward the nearest farmhouse, leaving the object of my frustration to its own fate.

A friendly old man with a Red Cross armband met us outside the back door. I signaled to Hatten and then to the house. Surprisingly, he told me in English that this was Denmark, occupied by the Germans, and he couldn't help me due to fear of retaliation from the Germans. So I asked him if I could wash the blood off my co-pilot's face, and he reluctantly led us into the kitchen, where his wife had a bucket of water ready.

I washed Hatten's face and tried to assess the severity of the gash when the family erupted into a verbal commotion. I looked out of a window and spotted a well-fed German soldier with a submachine gun, sneaking up to the house. He kicked the door open and shouted loudly in German, swinging the weapon menacingly. The old man instructed me to drop my pistol on the floor, which (after realizing it was under my belt) I did quickly. Later, I reflected on the irony that after the struggle to survive, a Very Pistol with a spent cartridge could have been the cause of my demise. C'est la guerre (such is war); we were now prisoners of war.

Captain Robert B. Clay, 1944

From the perspective of the local Alsingers, the emergency landing unfolded as follows:

The plane entered Als from the north, passing the village of Svendstrup and also the Danfoss administration building. Unusually, there had been no other aircraft in the area that day, and the sound of a plane with engine trouble attracted significant attention as it broke through the low clouds. When the plane emerged from the clouds, it was so low that people on the ground could see the American markings on the fuselage.

Captain Clay, the pilot, faced serious issues with the aircraft, so he ordered the crew to bail out. Two crew members parachuted over the village of Svendstrup near the Danfoss factory, and six others landed about 1 km farther southeast near the village of Klingbjerg, forming a line down to the farm "Solbjerggaard." The plane was at such a low altitude that further escape was impossible.

After another 5 km, the plane flew over the villages of Holmskov and Østerholm. An eyewitness, Kaj Valentin, stood in the yard of his parents' farm, "Lysmose," near Holmskov, and he remembers the plane passing directly over the chimney of the house.

The owner of Myrholm, Peter Clausen, was working with his horse and wagon when his wife, Marie, came out of the front door and shouted that a plane had crashed at 2:25 PM on the other side of the house. Peter had heard the noise but assumed it was merely a collapse in the barn at Skærtøft. As he hurried around the house, he encountered Clay and Hatten in his garden. Although he couldn't speak English, he could see that Hatten needed some assistance with his head wound. Peter led them into the kitchen, where his wife treated the injury and then provided them with food.

There were a large number of German soldiers in the area, and within an hour, they had captured the entire crew, who were unable to hide or flee. Their chances of avoiding captivity were diminished because the region had been part of Germany from 1864 until 1920. Despite the majority of the local population

voting to return to Danish rule, there were still German sympathizers more than willing to inform the occupying forces of the presence of Allied airmen.

Farmer Niels Good in Klingbjerg helped a crew member who landed on his field while he was painting his house with his daughter Ellen. They hid the parachute in a hunting lodge, but it was later discovered by German soldiers. The local population managed to conceal some parachutes, which were later used for wedding dresses, the white cross in a Danish flag, and other purposes."

"Materials were hard to come by during and after the war, and parachutes were of very high quality. Surprisingly, the footprints where the American had landed were 3 inches deep and remained visible throughout the summer. All the other crew members landed within a few hundred meters; one landed in a tree, and it took some time to get him down. Six of those who had bailed out gathered at 'Doktorhuset,' where Maria and Anna Clausen lived. Anna was a doctor at the hospital in Sønderborg, 30 km away. All the Americans were well-received and immediately invited to join a birthday celebration in the family.

The crew members must have experienced quite a culture shock. Just a short time before, they had been part of the horrors of war, and now they sat in an Alsian 'gui dønsk' with coffee and cake, engaging in conversation. After a longer-than-expected delay, the Germans arrived. The delay was caused by locals misleading the soldiers about the whereabouts of the Allied flyers. Although the Germans were displeased with the good treatment the Americans received from the Danes, they still allowed them to finish their meal before taking them to Myrholm, where the two pilots were held captive.

Tail gunner Wimmer was immediately contacted by a local member of the resistance, Mogens Dyhre, who was hiding from the Germans in the grocery store across from Danfoss. Dyhre offered to hide the crew members, but they declined, having received instructions to stay together.

Over the next few hours, the ten crew members were brought to Myrholm, from where they were all taken to the wreckage of 'Stormy Weather.' There, a German officer berated them upon seeing the 21 mission markings painted on the bomber. It was highly unusual for a bomber to survive 21 missions, which meant that the aircraft must have caused significant damage to Germany since January 1944, after leaving the Boeing factory in Seattle.

Later that afternoon, news spread throughout Als that a Flying Fortress had crash-landed in Østerholm, and a large number of people went there to see the wreckage. However, a couple of German soldiers guarded the plane, ensuring that no one could approach it.

In the following days, the Germans removed the wreckage of 'Stormy Weather' on trucks, and the crew members were sent to prisoner-of-war camps in Germany.

After the war's end, all ten crew members of 'Stormy Weather' safely returned to their homes in the USA. In gratitude for their efforts during World War II to liberate Europe, this memorial was erected. It was created by students at EUC-Syd under the initiative of the 'Stormy Weather' committee, consisting of Mogens Dyre, Gunnar Hounsgaard, and Leo Bram. EUC Syd was involved in the project to create a monument, while the B-17 propeller was brought from Holland by Leo Bram and prepared for the monument at Danfoss on Als. The tail section with the J-marking, as originally applied to the aircraft.

On May 24, 2001, five of the crew members, along with their relatives, returned to Als. Their hosts were the former municipalities of Augustenborg, Nordborg, and Sønderborg. Even today, we are incredibly grateful and honored to have the visit of several family members and descendants of the crew from the USA, as well as the British guests, who are descendants of RAF bombers that were also shot down over Als.

Thank you so much to our American and British friends for making the long trip to Als, Denmark, participating, and celebrating with us on the 80th anniversary of this fateful event.

Tak fordi I lyttede! (Thank you for listening!) Bjørn Allerelli Andersen