

A B-24 Liberator That Wouldn't Fly

by George Krynovich (778th)

Most combat aviators recall an incident from which they thought they would not survive: Individual stories would rivet you to your seat. Many credit it to LUCK, but I have often wondered, is it LUCK, or is it something too deep for us to comprehend?

On 25 August 1944, our Liberator crew departed Hamilton Field, CA in a factory-fresh B-24J to Amarillo AAF TX, the home town of our co-pilot, Bill Fears. Bill planned to spend an evening with his parents and fiancé. The crew checked into the Post Billets.

This first leg of our journey to Gioia del Colle, Italy took 7 hours and 10 Minutes. No major mechanical faults were encountered.

The next day, 26 August 1944, we filed a flight plan to Grenier AAF at Manchester, NH. We were maxed out on take-off weight with a full fuel load, lots of crew baggage and with an airport elevation of 3600 feet and a high ambient temperature. As we taxied toward the end of the runway, I asked Bill to complete the "Before Take-Off Check List". We were cleared for take-off and Bill responds, "Check list complete." I eased the throttles forward to take-off power and RPM and we started down the runway.

As we progressed down the runway, I sensed that we were using a lot of runway without an increase in airspeed. By the time I should have aborted, it was too late. The end of the runway was fast approaching and the airspeed was too low for a normal rotation.

I had no choice -- I eased the stick back, the nose came up slightly and we were airborne. I called for "Gear Up" and still could not get much increase in airspeed. At this point we are skimming the ground. [Ed. of 464th BG newsletter - Thank God for the "Ground Effect"]

I am now flying figuratively "by the seat of my pants". My novice pilot brain asks, "WHY, WHAT AM I DOING WRONG, WHY ARE WE NOT FLYING?" AND -- then it came to me in a microsecond flashback. Scene: Jan 1944, Liberal KS AAF, engines classroom--the instructor's Foot Stomper -- "A LIB WON'T FLY WITH THE COWL FLAPS OPEN"!

I screamed "TRAIL THE **@~!!* COWL FLAPS!"

Bill grabbed and pulled the paddle switch toward the Trail position, moving all four flap toggle switches simultaneously. Immediately my 'behind' sensed that we're finally flying. The airspeed increased, I eased the nose up and we started our climb. Up to that point, I doubt that we were ever higher than 20 feet above the ground.

With retracted cowl flaps, shaking stopped and I breathed a sigh of relief and called for the climb check-list. There are 15 items on the B-24 take-off check list. Why didn't Bill complete the last item - "Cowl Flaps -Trail"? Who knows? He was probably distracted during the radio communications with Amarillo tower.

The crew probably thinks that their "closest call" was our 17 October 1944 mission to Vienna's South Ordnance Depot. Me? -- Mine may well have been during that 26 August 1944 take-off at Amarillo TX. My belated Thanks to the "foot-stomping" Liberal engines instructor for making your point. Thank GOD, I remembered it. [Ed. of the 464th BG newsletter - The 24 won't climb with full flap (wing), also]

From Grenier, we went to Gander, Newfoundland, to Lagens Field, Azores, to Marrakech, Morocco in North Africa, to El Quina at Tunis and on to Gioia Italy. Flight time 38 hours & 25 minutes. [Ed. of 464th BG newsletter - We had a faster B-24, same route 34 hours+, perhaps we had better tail winds also. John Gottschalk our navigator may remember. We flew the same route about the same time.]

The Krynovich Crew: George Stockinger (N); Ellis Lorre (B); Bob Hemmeger (EG); Chuck Brockman (IRG); Olin Mullinex (IG); Bill Henry (BG); Pinky Richardson (TG); Bert Gallagher (WG).