

*Reports on crash landing on 2 December 1944
near Münzingen/Saar
Pilot: Charles W. Palmer*

Statement

by Captain Richard B. Willis Jr.
MACR 11902

On **2 December 1944**, on a combat mission, 2nd Lt. **Charles W. Palmer**, O-765306, was flying in No. 3 position in the flight. I was flying No. 4 position. At approximately 1015 hours, after an unsuccessful pass at the target, Lt. Palmer peeled off and left the formation. The last I saw him he was losing altitude and was heading approximately due East.

Richard B. Willis Jr.
Captain, Air Corps

Statement

by 1st Lt. Maurice C. Langford
MACR 11902

Our bomb release time on the target was 1000 hours, our box was on time but did not bomb due to PFF failure. We encountered heavy flak on the bomb run and all the way around the turn off the target. It required about ten minutes for our box leader to make a visual run on the target. Just prior to opening our bomb bay doors on the second run, the right engine of Lt. Palmer's airplane broke into flame, leaving a trail of heavy white smoke. He was some two thousand feet below us the last I saw of him. The time was approximately 1020 hours.

Maurice C. Langford
1st Lt., Air Corps

Statement

by 1st Lt. Robert D. Wallace
MACR 11902

On 2 December 1944 I was flying No. 6 position in the 3rd flight, 1st box. On our first run over the target we experienced some flak. While we were making our second run, the No. 3 man in the flight developed trouble in his right engine. First a blast of flame shot out and then it smoked fiercely. The pilot could not stay in formation and dropped out to the left. My gunner watched him drop down about six-thousand (6,000) feet and did not see any chutes open. The plane was still heading in the direction of Germany and it seemed to be under control.

Robert D. Wallace
1st Lt., Air Corps

Statement

by Cpl. Henry A. Morris
MACR 11902

I, Cpl. **Henry A. Morris**, 32952731, was forced down on enemy soil. The pilot was 2nd Lt. **Charles W. Palmer**, O-765306, the tunnel gunner was Cpl. **George E. Beauchamp**, 17064620. My position was in the turret.

After leaving the target I noticed that the right engine of our plane was smoking. I called Lt. Palmer and told him about it. A little later he told us to prepare to bail out. I got down from the turret and put on my parachute and waited for further instructions. Lt. Palmer changed his decision about jumping and decided to crash land the plane.

We jettisoned the tunnel gun and any other equipment that might cause injury to us in the crash. After the landing we got out of the ship as quickly as possible. After checking to see if anyone was injured, I asked what was wrong with the engine. Lt. Palmer said it had become over heated. We thought that we were in friendly territory and that there was no need to destroy the plane, but that one of us would stay and guard the plane while the others went to a nearby village for help.

I decided to stay with the plane but did not say so because at that time the L-4 arrived at the scene of the crash. We started waving our map in the air to attract his attention. A little later another L-4 arrived and the first L-4 began to circle for a landing. A burst of light machine gun fire came from the nearby woods and the L-4 went straight up. However, it came in again and landed.



Piper L-4 Grasshopper

The pilot of the L-4 informed us that we were in enemy territory and that he could take one of us out and they would try to get back and pick up the other two. Lt. Palmer told me to get in and go with the L-4 pilot. I got into the plane and the rest of the crew started to leave the plane. I asked them where they were going, and they said that they were going into the woods. I told them not to go there as there was a mortar position located there. I threw them my pistol, and the L-4

took off down hill from the Germans. the last time I saw them they were going back to the plane, either to take cover there or to destroy the radio.

The L-4 pilot later reported that there were three (3) Germans (probably officers) advancing towards the plane. I did not see them. He landed me at his base and made a report to the Officer in Charge.

They immediately took off with all available planes and went back to the scene of the crash. They carried observers in all planes but two. The ones with the observers were to stay up and cover the other two with small arms. However, after making several unsuccessful attempts to land, they returned to the base. They did not return because the C. O. of their unit decided that it was entirely too dangerous to try again. During all of the action Lt. Palmer and Cpl. Beauchamp were never seen.

From the L-4 base I was flown back to C-3 Air and was interrogated by Lt. Col. Huckins.

Henry A. Morris

32952731

Cpl., 647th Bomb Sq (L)

Book extract

Morrison, Jack K., Longneck. A History of the 274th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, XX Corps, 2006, p. 33 - 35

Because of the dangerousness of our positions and the relative ineffectiveness in covering the front a such close range, the battalion displaced on November 27th to alternate positions in the vicinity of MERSCHWEILER, FRANCE, about two miles to the southwest.

From our new positions the Battalion was able to cover nearly fifteen miles of front lines in support of the Third Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron of the Third Cav. Group, which had taken over this sector and which continued to hold this sector throughout our stay in this vicinity. From here we fired primarily defensive fires into the areas and towns of BORG, ORSCHOLZ, TETTINGEN, SINZ, OBERLEUKEN, FAHA, KESSLINGEN, BESCH and the SAARBURG FOREST. Our Forward Observers and Reconnaissance Officers and their sections were kept busy manning two flash OP's and observing enemy artillery fire for the cavalry. These observers, plus our two air observers, furnished much needed information and support to the operations of the rough-riding mechanized cavalry boys. During our 21-stay in these positions the battalion fired 11,254 rounds at a great variety of targets ranging from herds of cattle and flocks of sheep to enemy tanks and one of our own bombers which had been forced down behind the German lines. This in itself is a most unusual story.

Probably one of the most breath-taking of all the experiences of the battalion took place on **the second of December**. The incident involved primarily the air section and accentuates the ever present initiative and effectiveness with which they operated throughout the war. The day was fairly clear and Lt. George Irvine, flying his Cub plane, the *Pie Eyed Piper*, together with Lt. Rau, our air observer, were on their regular patrol seeking targets for our artillery. At 0945 hours they spotted an A-20 attack bomber circling over enemy lines and very obviously in trouble. The immediately attempted to signal the bomber to follow them in order that they might land in friendly territory.

The crew of the bomber failed to see the Cub and after a few minutes landed in enemy territory near HILL 399 [*Ehringer Berg*], MÜNZINGEN, GERMANY. After witnessing the crash landing, Lt. Irvine flew to his base and discharged Lt. Rau from the plane in order that he could return solo to the scene of the accident and render all possible aid. Lt. Irvine then contacted by radio our other Liaison plane piloted by Lt. Robert E. Wittstruck, Jr., with Lt. Fred Rau as his observer, and informed them of the situation with instruction for them to fly to the scene of the accident and be prepared to deliver artillery fire if he (Lt. Irvine) were attacked while aiding the bomber crew. The Lieutenant then landed his plane near the wrecked bomber on terrain heavily shell pocked and proceeded to the bomber, informing the crew that they were in enemy territory, that he would evacuate one man in his plane, that an attempt would be made to rescue the rest of the men from the plane later.

A hasty poll elected the junior member of the crew, Corporal Morris, to be the first to be evacuated and, even as he boarded the plane, the Cub's radio crackled with the message that Lt. Wittstruck and Lt. Rau in the cover plane had spotted three *bosche* infantrymen bearing down on the plane. In addition a *kraut* machine gun crew was ready to open fire. And that is precisely what happened: for no sooner had the message been received than the crew and the planes were subjected to heavy rifle and machine gun fire.

At the same time our artillery pieces, adjusted by Lt. Rau, began sending shells into the area. Lt. Rau had called for smoke and the big white puffs were now affording the men some very valuable concealment. Taking advantage of the smoke screen laid now by the precision shooting, the pilot and engineer of the bomber ran to their plane for cover. At the same time Lt. Irvine and Cpl. Morris succeeded in taking off.

Enroute to the home field, Lt. Irvine radioed for higher headquarters to dispatch two solo planes to pick up the two remaining crew members. Upon arrival at the home field, Lt. Irvine landed his passenger and picked up Lt. Griffith, armed him with a sub-machine gun and returned immediately to the scene of the accident to give fire support to the two solo planes.

But on arrival at the spot they were unable to locate the other two planes. Lt. Irvine and Lt. Griffith narrowly escaped being shot down at this time as they were again subjected to intense machine gun fire. The other two Cubs had experienced the same thing and, as a result, had been unable to land and pick up the remainder of the crew.

Later in the day white phosphorus was employed to destroy the bomber in order that any military secrets would not fall into the hands of the enemy. It is generally assumed that the pilot and engineer were taken prisoners by the "square heads".

For his bravery and daring with complete disregard for personal safety, plus the skill and initiative employed, Lt. Irvine was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.