

Newspaper 1946

An account that appeared in the Hamilton Journal-News in 1946 with quotations from a letter sent to the Hoskins family and written by Ben Snyder the brother of Joe Snyder (wg) on aircraft s/n 42-97457, "Straight Shot's" last mission, February 25th 1944.

Learn All Abroad Ill-Fated B-17 Accounted for Except Lt. Hoskins, Parents of Hamiltonian Told

Additional information concerning the disappearance of their son, Second Lt. Lee Edward Hoskins, age 20, reported missing in action for two years in Germany and declared dead officially last week by the war department, has been received by Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Hoskins.

A letter was received from Ben C. Snyder, Middlesboro, Ky., a brother of one of the Hamiltonian's crew members, Joe Snyder (wg), with details of this last bombing mission in the B-17. Joe was injured and later returned home. Lieutenant Lee Hoskins (n), a navigator, participated in the five great sky battles, fought during the "Big Week" the last of February, 1944, when American bombers broke the back of German air power and cleared Europe's skies for invasion.

Excerpts from the letter to the Hoskins family are as follows:

"Joe told me the whole story of their misfortune and his imprisonment. Although I realize that any information about Lee is most interesting to you, I will tell you first about Joe and lead up to the last time he saw Lee.

Joe says they were on what was called the Regensburg raid, but their objective was Augsburg. They were flying as deputy lead that day. They were hit with flack going over France, and although damaged, they continued. Later they were forced to fall out of formation because of engines out, but continued on to the target and dropped their bomb load.

While out of formation, they were attacked by fighters. Wesley Schneider (bt) shot down two, Woskovich (tg) one from the tail and Joe (wg) one. After this, he says the ship was in bad condition, with two engines on the right side out, and Bower (p) was having trouble leveling off. The ship was flying in a large circle.

Second Attack

They decided to make it to Switzerland, and Lee had the course charted, but they just couldn't get altitude. Up to this time, none of the crew was injured. However, all guns were knocked out except one waist gun and the upper ball turret. They were attacked again by four fighters, two coming in at the waist. Joe (wg) shot down one, but the second came on in firing.

A shell came into the side of the plane, wounding Joe (wg) in several places about the chest, arm, upper leg and breaking his leg below the knee. It killed Wesley Schneider (bt) and Jesse Hirschburg(wg) instantly, and John Popowitz (r) was struck in the hip which took his leg off.

Joe's gun was destroyed, he said, and all these men were thrown together inside the ship. He was trying to get up when Woskovich (tg) came from the tail gun, uninjured, and they were trying to get out. He said that at this time as far as he knew, only Baxendale (cp) was injured among the officers and that Cooke (b)and Lee (n) were back in the radio room having come

from the nose of the plane before the attack. Woskovich (wg) bailed out first and Joe (wg) crawled to the door and went out second.

Crews Bail Out

Joe (wg) said he saw, while coming down, the others bail out with the exception of Hirschburg (wg) and Schneider (bt). Cooke (b) carried Baxendale out on his back, but when he opened his chute, Baxendale fell off; they never saw him again after that. Bower (p) was the last to leave the plane, and Bower opened John Popowitz's chute (r) and threw him out (he lived for two days in a hospital and died).

Joe (wg) said the plane was almost to the ground when Bower (p) left it. He said that Lee (n) and Cooke (b) came out about the same time and landed near each other. (He talked to Cooke (b) after meeting him just before they were liberated.)

Joe (wg) landed about ten miles from the others and after considerable mistreatment at the hands of German civilians was taken to a hospital. (They came down a few miles from Berchtesgarden in the Redoubt section, which probably accounts for the mistreatment.) He did not see any of the other boys until two days later when Bower (p) was brought in to the hospital with burns and a broken leg. Giordano (e) was uninjured, as were Woskovich (tg) and Cooke (b). He said that after talking to Bower (p) and the others, and Cooke (b) just before being liberated, he found all of the men were accounted for except for Lee. Cooke told Joe that he was sure Lee Hoskins (n) was uninjured when they bailed out.

Of the crew members aboard the plane, four were killed, two were injured, three were safe and Lieutenant Hoskins (n) just disappeared."

Lieutenant Hoskins was widely known as one of Hamilton s most popular youths.

On December 8th, 2004 the following message was posted on the 457th Message Board and resolves the question of what happened to Lee Hoskins. We don't know how he died but we do know his body was recovered.

Posted by Hyman N. Hirschberg on 12/8/2004, 12:32 pm 68.35.198.17

I am the brother of Sgt. Jesse J. Hirschberg, who was killed on the last mission of the Straight Shot on February 25, 1944. I came across this Web page and saw "The Mission," about Straight Shot and its crew. I saw that in a letter mailed to the family of Lee Hoskins from Ben Snyder that Lt. Hoskins was listed as having disappeared.

My brother, Jesse; Sgt. Wesley Schneider; and Lt. Lee E. Hoskins were all buried together under one headstone at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, DC, in a ceremony held before all three families. I have a photograph of the headstone that I can send once I have an actual e-mail address to sent it to.

A portion of this message was deleted for the reason that it was personal in nature.