

# Mid Air Collision at Wendover

December 23rd 1943

In the April issue of the 457th Bomb Group Association Newsletter, I posed a question to anyone who might have information that could lead to solving a mystery concerning the loss of B-17 s/n 42-31541. Many of us knew that the plane had crashed near Wendover during training exercises but there seemed to be no records of what happened nor what crews were involved. Last month we received an email from Carey Jones who was flying in one of the planes in the formation in which this midair collision occurred.

From the information that Carey Jones gave us, and with confirming evidence which we received from the Air Force Military Aircraft Accident Records, we feel we now have the complete story. Carey Jones's account follows just as we received it. (with Mr. Jones permission) My response to Jones's email follows.

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The 457th Bomb Group Association Newsletter, April 2002, Article under (Your Association's Website on the Internet ) - last paragraph about December 24, 1943 plane # 42-31541.

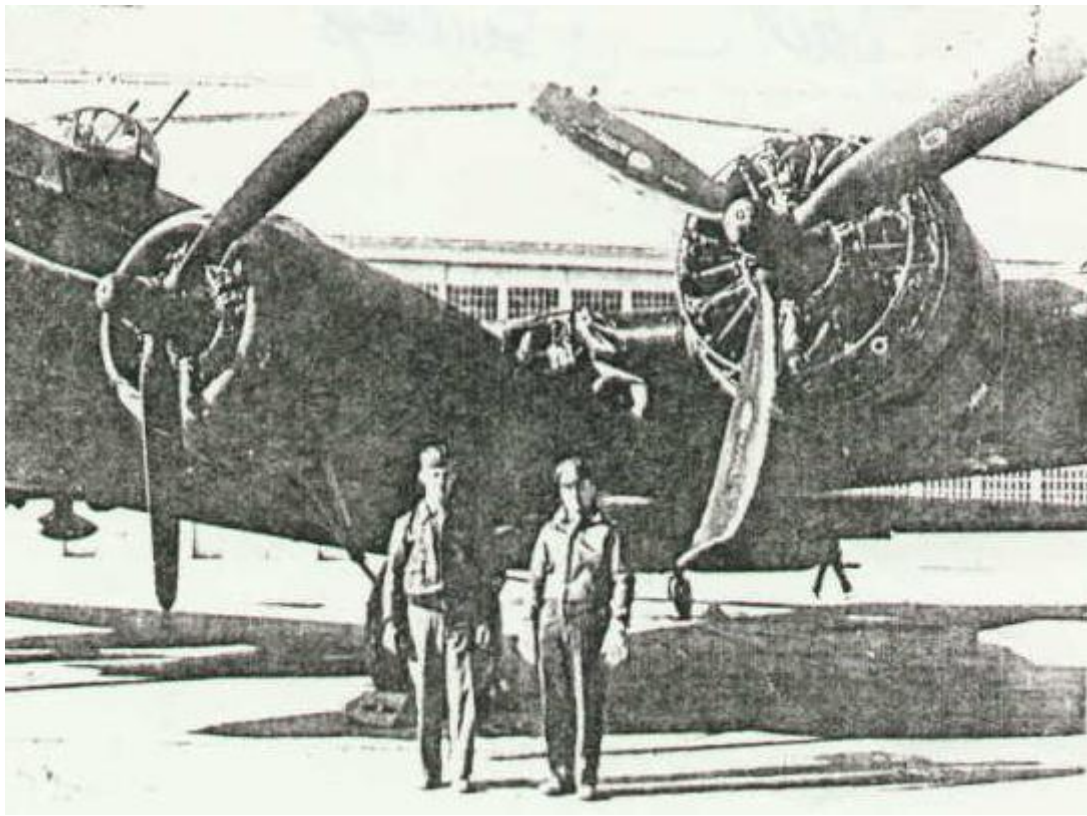
My name is James Carey Jones of Anderson, South Carolina crew member of Roger W. Birkman, 748th BS, 457th BG, trained 1st phase in Ephrata, Washington, later moved to Rapid City S D., then on to Wendover field Utah. I do not recall a mid-air crash in December of 1943, at Ephrata, however, I do remember that on December 23, 1943 the 457th flew a 54 ship practice formation to camera bomb Omaha, Nebraska. We had fighters escorts to the target and then the fighters were to act as enemy attack planes on the return trip to Wendover field. The mission was a success and when we landed back at Wendover the visiting high ranking officer wanted to see another take off and forming up of a six plane squadron. The 748th squadron was chosen to make the flight. I can name three of the pilots in this six plane formation. They were Roger W. Birkman, Kenneth W. Burkhart, and Paul W. Chapman. What led to this terrible accident is as the following:

The first three planes of the lead element were already in place. The # 4 plane, flown by Lt William Snow, was forming a three plane element with the # 5 plane, flown by Lt Birkman, and the # 6 plane flown by Lt Burkhart.

The three planes were racing to catch up with the lead element and came on too fast. It was obvious to Lt. Birkman (# 5) and Lt. Burkhart (# 6) that Snow (# 4), flying element lead, was overshooting.

Each peeled off to the right and left. All this was happening at about 1500 feet.

Lt Snow (# 4) did in fact overshoot and pulled his tail up into Lt Paul Chapman's plane (# 3). Chapman's # 1 and # 2 engine immediately cut-off the tail of Snow's (# 4) plane. Chapman's Navigator or Bombardier bailed out with no injuries and Lt. Chapman was able to land his badly damaged plane. Snow's plane crashed before anyone could bail out.



*Richard T. Trundy, radio operator standing on the left and Paul V. Chapman, pilot on the right in front of 42-38065. Damage to the aircraft's engines #1 and #2 is obvious.*

Birkman (#5) and Burkhardt (#6) crews were not able to land until they got Lt. Chapman's damaged plane off the runway. (Which was a good while). When we were able to land we had chow and went to the movies to be called out to the flight line for another flight of two hours.

The tail gunner of Snow's plane asked to be excused from the six plane flight so as to use the bathroom (GI's). This airman had the grim task, later that day, to go meet the train that was bringing one of his dead crew members mother to Wendover to spend Christmas with her son. This was a sad time for all of us at Wendover field.

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Carey,

How great to hear from you and with such detail about this accident. We have been researching this thru the Air Force Accident Reports and have come up with considerable information that is verified herewith by your personal observations. And you are correct. This accident took place of Dec 23rd, 1943 at Wendover. Wow, you were actually there. No better first hand report.

We have determined that the plane that crashed was Lt William R. Snow, flying 42-31541 and the damaged plane involved in this collision was 42-38065, flown by Lt Paul V. Chapman. [42-38065 was badly damaged but was repaired and flew again....it never got overseas.]

Your description explains everything. We are not certain but assume that all of the Snow crew died and that no one was injured or killed in the Chapman aircraft. Can you confirm this? [this was confirmed by Carey Jones....there was a survivor from his crew who did not fly on that practice mission (see above)]

We have determined the names of all the crew members from both planes that were involved in this tragedy but have failed to locate any of the survivors. Do you know if the Chapman

crew ever went overseas? We find no record of their being at Glatton. [Carey Jones later confirmed that Chapman's crew did join the 457th at Glatton]

This is really an outstanding resolution to a long-standing mystery and I want to thank you for your response. It surely must have been a sad Christmas for all the crews at Wendover.

The story of this accident deserves to be preserved together with the many stories of war heroism that the 457th Bomb Group experienced. I would like to request your approval to use your name and email story to be added to the chronicle of plane losses experienced by the 457th.

Do I have your permission to publish your email (annotated by me) in the next Newsletter and to be used where we see fit on the Association's website? [Carey Jones gave us permission]

Thank you again and please keep in touch,

Hap

Note: The crew of the other (Chapman - #42-38065) plane involved in this collision was as follows:

Pilot - Lt. Paul V. Chapman  
Copilot - Lt James E. Oscnier  
Navigator - Lt William C. Albro  
Bombardier - Lt George R. Walker  
Engineer - Sgt Kenneth E. Myers  
Radio - Sgt Richard T. Trundy  
Waist - Sgt Robert S. Wood  
Gunner - Sgt Anthony Marrone  
Gunner - Cpl. Mendel L. Segesman

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*New Information added on 12/23/2002*

This is a repeat of a paragraph that was in the original story above:

"The tail gunner of Snow's plane asked to be excused from the six plane flight so as to use the bathroom (GI's). This airman had the grim task, later that day, to go meet the train that was bringing one of his dead crew members mother to Wendover to spend Christmas with her son."

Carey

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NOW! To my pleasant surprise this past week (December, 2002), I received an email from the very person mentioned in this story as having been excused from this flight because of the "GI's". His name is T. J. Shields and he was the ball turret gunner on the William R. Snow crew.

This should be a final statement in this long ago lost information. Here is his email to me.

My name is T. J. Shields, and I would like to make some additions and corrections to the story of plane s/n 42-31541.

I joined Lt. William Snow's crew in Moses Lake, Washington as the tenth crew member. After a short training period there, we were transferred to Euphrata for a short time and then on to Wendover.

On this particular day our pilots were practicing instrument flying with 1st Lt. Wilbur Snow observing. Lt. Wilbur Snow was our operation officer. We landed so Lt. Wilbur Snow could get off the plane so we could join the formation flying. I was the one who needed to use the bathroom. As Lt. Snow came through the waist to exit, I told him of my problem. He told me to tell our pilot, Lt William Snow, and waited for me to exit with him. after which our plane went on to join the formation. and the subsequent crash. Don Olney was the other crew member on our crew--he had stayed on the ground that day to phone his mother. and decided he would quit flying, after the crash. I was assigned to Lt. Ken Burkhart's crew, to replace one of his crewmembers who also decided not to fly any more.

Both Don and I had the unpleasant task of informing Mrs. Henning of the death of her only child, James. She had come to spend Christmas with him. Don Olney was the tail gunner, Morris Strong was the right waist gunner, and I was ball turret gunner.

T. J.

This email from T.J. Shields should complete the missing information on this tragic accident.

Hap Reese