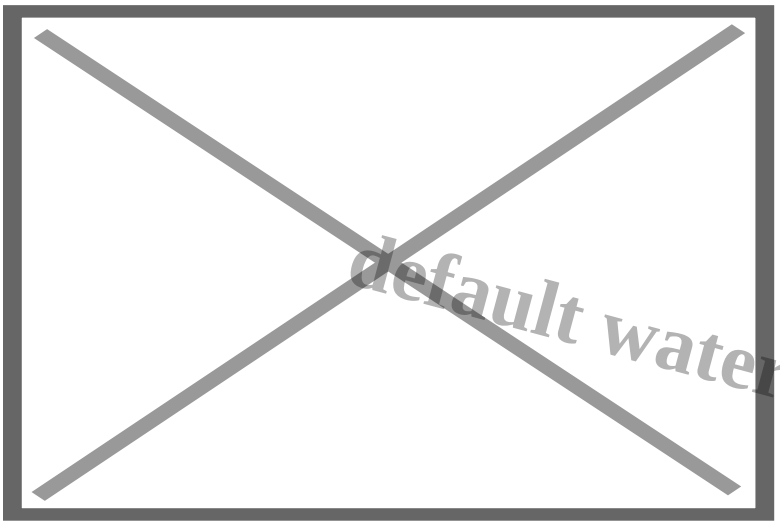
Captain Glenn Rojohn, USAAF, â€œPiggyback Heroâ€•

Description

Quite an amazing story about two bombers that collided enroute their return from Germany and landed together in Franceâ€¦.The last remaining crewmember, Capt Rojohn just passed away.



From the 100th Bomber Group achives, hereâ€™s the story:

> LT GLENN ROJOHN; PIGGY BACK LANDING AFTER THE 31 DEC 1944 HAMBURG MISSION. COLLISION WITH LT MacNAB WHILE BOTH WERE ATTEMPTING TO FILL THE SLOT IN THE FORMATION CAUSED BY THE LOSS OF LT WEBSTER. ACCOUNT GIVEN IN â€œCENTURY BOMBERâ€• FOLLOWS: AT 1244 HOURS AND AFTER LEAVING THE ENEMY COAST, NAVIGATOR DANNY SHAFFER, WHO FLEW WITH THOMAS HUGHES, NOTED IN HIS LOG: â€œTWO 17â€™S HOOKED TOGETHER, 43-31987, PILOTED BY GLENN ROJOHN, HAVING CLOSED UP INTO THE SPACE LEFT BY THE LOSS OF LT WEBSTER. UNFORTUNATELY B-17 43-38457, PILOTED BY WILLIAM MacNAB, HAD RISEN SLOWLY FROM BELOW TO FILL THE SAME POSITION..â€• ANOTHER PILOT, ETHAN PORTER, WHO IS LISTED AS HAVING NO KNOWN ADDRESS BY THE VA(1992), IMMEDIATELY SHOUTED A WARNING VIA RADIO, THE TWO FORTRESSES COLLIDED AND LOCKED TOGETHER, CONTINUED FLYING PIGGY-BACK OVER THE SEA.â€™
>
> FINDING THE ELEVATORS AND AILERONS STILL WORKING, ROJOHN AND HIS CO-PILOT WILLIAM LEEK, â€˜CUT THEIR ENGINES, AND BY USING THE ENGINES OF THE LOWER AIRCRAFT, THREE OF WHICH WERE STILL RUNNING, SLOWLY TURNED THE TWO AIRCRAFT TOWARD LAND. FOUR OF THE CREW BAILED OUT ON ORDERS AND ROJOHN DESCENDED TO RECROSS THE ENEMY COAST AT 10,000 FEET. ON LANDING NEAR WILHELMSHAVEN THE TOP SHIP (43-31987) SLID OFF MacNABâ€™S

43-38457 WHICH EXPLODED. BARELY HURT ROJOHN AND LEEK WALKED AWAY FROM THE WRECKAGE OF 43-31987 AND INTO CAPTIVITY. AS FOR THE MEN WHO BAILED OUT, THE ROG EDWARD NEUHAUS CAME DOWN ON AN ISLAND; TTE ORVILLE ELKIN CAME DOWN IN THE WATER TEN MILES OFF SHORE AND WAS DRAGGED TO THE SHORE BY HIS CHUTE. REPLACEMENTS NAVIGATOR ROBERT WASHINGTON AND GUNNER JAMES SHRILEY LANDED ON THE COAST. ALL SURVIVORS WERE TAKEN PRISONER. NOTHING WAS FOUND OF BTG JOSEPH RUSSO AND WG FRANCIS CHASE.

I received this interesting story via email, and it is reported as thruthful by Truth or Fiction website:

Piggyback Hero
by Ralph Kinney Bennett
Tomorrow morning theyâ€™ll lay the remains of Glenn Rojohn to rest in the Peace Lutheran Cemetery in the little town of Greenock, Pa., just southeast of Pittsburgh. He was 81, and had been in the air conditioning and plumbing business in nearby McKeesport. If you had seen him on the street he would probably have looked to you like so many other graying, bespectacled old World War II veterans whose names appear so often now on obituary pages.

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But like so many of them, though he seldom talked about it, he could have told you one hell of a story. He won the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Purple Heart all in one fell swoop in the skies over Germany on December 31, 1944.

Fell swoop indeed.

Capt. Glenn Rojohn, of the 8th Air Forceâ€™s 100th Bomb Group, was flying his B-17G Flying Fortress bomber on a raid over Hamburg. His formation had braved heavy flak to drop their bombs, then turned 180 degrees to head out over the North Sea.

They had finally turned northwest, headed back to England, when they were jumped by German fighters at 22,000 feet. The Messerschmitt Me-109s pressed their attack so closely that Capt. Rojohn could see the faces of the German pilots.

He and other pilots fought to remain in formation so they could use each otherâ€™s guns to defend the group. Rojohn saw a B-17 ahead of him burst into flames and slide sickeningly toward the earth. He gunned his ship forward to fill in the gap.

He felt a huge impact. The big bomber shuddered, felt suddenly very heavy and began losing altitude. Rojohn grasped almost immediately that

he had collided with another plane. A B-17 below him, piloted by Lt. William G. McNab, had slammed the top of its fuselage into the bottom of Rojohnâ€™s. The top turret gun of McNabâ€™s plane was now locked in the belly of Rojohnâ€™s plane and the ball turret in the belly of Rojohnâ€™s had smashed through the top of McNabâ€™s. The two bombers were almost perfectly aligned â€“ the tail of the lower plane was slightly to the left of Rojohnâ€™s tailpiece. They were stuck together, as a crewman later recalled, â€œlike mating dragon flies.â€•

No one will ever know exactly how it happened. Perhaps both pilots had moved instinctively to fill the same gap in formation. Perhaps McNabâ€™s plane had hit an air pocket.

Three of the engines on the bottom plane were still running, as were all four of Rojohnâ€™s. The fourth engine on the lower bomber was on fire and the flames were spreading to the rest of the aircraft. The two were losing altitude quickly. Rojohn tried several times to gun his engines and break free of the other plane. The two were inextricably locked together. Fearing a fire, Rojohn cuts his engines and rang the bailout bell. If his crew had any chance of parachuting, he had to keep the plane under control somehow.

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The ball turret, hanging below the belly of the B-17, was considered by many to be a death trap â€“ the worst station on the bomber. In this case, both ball turrets figured in a swift and terrible drama of life and death.

Staff Sgt. Edward L. Woodall, Jr., in the ball turret of the lower bomber, had felt the impact of the collision above him and saw shards of metal drop past him. Worse, he realized both electrical and hydraulic power was gone.

Remembering escape drills, he grabbed the handcrank, released the clutch and cranked the turret and its guns until they were straight down, then turned and climbed out the back of the turret up into the fuselage.

Once inside the planeâ€™s belly Woodall saw a chilling sight, the ball turret of the other bomber protruding through the top of the fuselage. In that turret, hopelessly trapped, was Staff Sgt. Joseph Russo. Several crewmembers on Rojohnâ€™s plane tried frantically to crank Russoâ€™s turret around so he could escape. But, jammed into the fuselage of the lower plane, the turret would not budge.

Aware of his plight, but possibly unaware that his voice was going out over the intercom of his plane, Sgt. Russo began reciting his Hail Marys.

Up in the cockpit, Capt. Rojohn and his co-pilot, 2nd Lt. William G. Leek, Jr., had propped their feet against the instrument panel so they could

pull back on their controls with a ll their strength, trying to prevent their plane from going into a spinning dive that would prevent the crew from jumping out.

Capt. Rojohn motioned left and the two managed to wheel the grotesque, collision-born hybrid of a plane back toward the German coast. Leek felt like he was intruding on Sgt. Russo as his prayers crackled over the radio, so he pulled off his flying helmet with its earphones.

Rojohn, immediately grasping that crew could not exit from the bottom of his plane, ordered his top turret gunner and his radio operator, Tech Sgts. Orville Elkin and Edward G. Neuhaus, to make their way to the back of the fuselage and out the waist door behind the left wing.

Then he got his navigator, 2nd Lt. Robert Washington, and his bombardier, Sgt. James Shirley to follow them. As Rojohn and Leek somehow held the plane steady, these four men, as well as waist gunner Sgt. Roy Little and tail gunner Staff Sgt. Francis Chase were able to bail out.

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Now the plane locked below them was aflame. Fire poured over Rojohnâ€™s left wing. He could feel the heat from the plane below and hear the sound of .50 caliber machinegun ammunition â€œcooking offâ€• in the flames. Capt. Rojohn ordered Lieut. Leek to bail out. Leek knew that without him helping keep the controls back, the plane would drop in a flaming spiral and the centrifugal force would prevent Rojohn from bailing. He refused the order.

Meanwhile, German soldiers and civilians on the ground that afternoon looked up in wonder. Some of them thought they were seeing a new Allied secret weapon â€“ a strange eight-engined double bomber. But anti-aircraft gunners on the North Sea coastal island of Wangerooge had seen the collision. A German battery captain wrote in his logbook at 2:47 p.m.: â€œTwo fortresses collided in a formation in the NE. The planes flew hooked together and flew 20 miles south. The two planes were unable to fight anymore. The crash could be awaited so I stopped the firing at these two planes.â€•

Suspended in his parachute in the cold December sky, Bob Washington watched with deadly fascination as the mated bombers, trailing black smoke, fell to earth about three miles away, their downward trip ending in an ugly boiling blossom of fire.

In the cockpit Rojohn and Leek held g rimly to the controls trying to ride a falling rock. Leek tersely recalled, â€œThe ground came up faster and faster. Praying was allowed. We gave it one last effort and slammed into the ground.â€•

The McNab plane on the bottom exploded, vaulting the other B-17 upward and forward. It hit the ground and slid along until its left wing slammed through a wooden building and the smoldering mass of aluminum came to a stop.

Rojohn and Leek were still seated in their cockpit. The nose of the plane was relatively intact, but everything from the B-17â€™s massive wings back was destroyed. They looked at each other incredulously. Neither was badly injured.

Movies have nothing on reality. Still perhaps in shock, Leek crawled out through a huge hole behind the cockpit, felt for the familiar pack in his uniform pocket and pulled out a cigarette. He placed it in his mouth and was about to light it. Then he noticed a young German soldier pointing a rifle at him. The soldier looked scared and annoyed. He grabbed the cigarette out of Leekâ€™s mouth and pointed down to the gasoline pouring out over the wing from a ruptured fuel tank.

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Two of the six men who parachuted from Rojohnâ€™s plane did not survive the jump. But the other four and, amazingly, four men from the other bomber, including ball turret gunner Woodall, survived. All were taken prisoner. Several of them were interrogated at lengt h by the Germans until they were satisfied that what had crashed was not a new American secret weapon.

Rojohn, typically, didnâ€™t talk much about his Distinguished Flying Cross. Of Leek, he said, â€œIn all fairness to my co-pilot, heâ€™s the reason Iâ€™m alive today.â€•

Like so many veterans, Rojohn got back to life unsentimentally after the war, marrying and raising a son and daughter. For many years, though, he tried to link back up with Leek, going through government records to try to track him down. It took him 40 years, but in 1986, he found the number of Leekâ€™s mother, in Washington State.

Yes, her son Bill was visiting from California. Would Rojohn like to speak with him? Two old men on a phone line, trying to pick up some familiar timbre of youth in each otherâ€™s voice. One can imagine that first conversation between the two men who had shared that wild ride in the cockpit of a B-17.

A year later, the two were re-united at a reunion of the 100th Bomb Group in Long Beach, Calif. Bill Leek died the following year.

Glenn Rojohn was the last survivor of the remarkable piggyback flight. He was like thousands upon thousands of men â€” soda jerks and lumberjacks, teachers and dentists, students and lawyers and service station attendants and store clerks and farm boys â€” who in the prime of

their lives went to war in World War II. They sometimes did incredible things, endured awful things, and for the most part most of them pretty much kept it to themselves and just faded back into the fabric of civilian life.

Capt. Glenn Rojohn, AAF, died last Saturday after a long siege of illness. But he apparently faced that fina l battle with the same grim aplomb he displayed that remarkable day over Germany so long ago. Let us be thankful for such men.

A great story. I wonder how many more stories like this one are lost each day as members of the Greatest Generation pass on.

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Date Created
June 4, 2006
Author
admin