

Vince Masters and the loss of "Lulu Belle" on Mission 11

Vince Masters wrote: "My crew and I were flying in the shuttle mission to Regensburg in our plane "*Lulu Belle*" on August 17, 1943. We had enemy aircraft attack us from the German border, over the Alps and over the Adriatic Sea. No friendly fighters at that time. We had the hell shot out of us. No. 1 engine knocked out, No. 2 smoking (on fire?), No. 3 sputtering. Both waist gunners and tail gunner wounded. Oxygen system out. Maj. Piper rode with us as Acting Command. One frightening ride. When we finally got to North Africa the war had moved on and so had the anticipated Army base. The engineers hung a cannibalized engine (of which there were many) to replace No. 1, fiddled with Nos. 2 and 3. We had no decent repair shops available in the desert of North Africa where we landed. Maj. Piper insisted that he ride with my crew on the way back to bomb Bordeaux even though I tried to tell him that "*Lulu Belle*" was too badly wounded and patched up for a return bombing run. I have no idea who I was given to replace my wounded gunners so I don't really know who was on my plane. I know that we lost Dewy (extra navigator since we were lead plane), my engineer, and two gunners who were in my notes only as Cameron and Jones. Air/Sea Rescue picked us up after 24 hrs. in the water. They told us that we had over-flown Lands End during the storm and actually ditched in the Atlantic. They said that they knew where we were, but the sea was running too high (30 ft. crests) to try to reach us. They didn't want to risk losing their rescue boat."

Maj. Piper and 1st Lt. Masters did a fantastic job of setting "*Lulu Belle*" down despite having two engines out on the same side. As Bill Arms, the Ball Gunner was first out, all he saw instead of an inflatable raft was a mass of yellow rubber in the water. He dove in and swam to it and partially inflated it with a hand pump. That act saved those who survived! Gunners Edward Sanders and Archie M. Cameron were washed overboard and clung to some seat cushions but were washed away and could not get to the raft. The remaining crewmen swam out to the raft and, in time, were able to fully inflate it. Five men were boosted into the raft and four hung on the outside: Maj. Preston Piper, Capt. John A. Dewey, Lt. Paul Schulz and Lt. Lee V. Jones. In exactly a timed 59 minutes the *Belle* sank. Two hours later an RAF plane dropped them another raft. Later, after darkness, Lt. Jones lost his grip and was washed away. The same thing happened to Capt. Dewey. At this point both Piper and Schulz climbed into the raft which now barely stayed afloat. Bill Arms brought a flare gun and three flares with him. They fired one when a search plane flew near. The second mis-fired so they held the last flare until the plane started to depart, then shot it. The search plane then remained overhead until the British Air Sea Rescue put them ashore at Torquay. After a few days in a hospital they returned to Great Ashfield. Schultz added that when they got in trouble, they discovered that the tuning for the radio units was for combat frequencies and not the ones for international distress calls.