

# ANOTHER WARTIME MEMORY

By D Howell Rees

© March 2004



On 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943 a Martin B-26 Marauder medium bomber from the United States' Eighth Air Force crash landed at Penrhyn Farm, Pwll.

This medium bomber 'workhorse' of the Eighth Air Force, Martin's much-maligned B-26 Marauder recovered from a very bad start to go on and equip no less than eight bomber groups.

Although initially dubbed 'the widow maker', a change of tactics from low- to medium-level bomber for the Marauder soon improved the crews' chances of survival. Indeed, by war's end it boasted a lower loss-per-sortie ratio than any other twin-engined bomber in the USAAF

Here is the story of the 'Mi Laine' which crashed with disastrous results on that fateful day in June 1943 when Pwll experienced the horrors of war at first hand.



**A BÔNAU CABBAGE PATCH SUPPLEMENT**

The weather on the afternoon of the 4<sup>th</sup> June 1943 was bad. Raining with low mist covering the coastal hills that overlook Pwll. It was not good flying weather and not unlike the weather that greeted Amelia Earhart on her arrival in The Burry Estuary at the end of her epic Atlantic flight fifteen years earlier, also in the month of June. In 1943 though, the mist was much lower and denser. The prevailing weather that summer's day in 1943 would play a critical role in the drama about to unfold in the upland mists above Pwll.



An aircraft had been heard circling in the thick mists that shrouded the hilltops and upland farms above Pwll. It was late afternoon. At the Penrhyn Farm, the unseasonal weather was not allowed to interrupt the rhythm and routine of the farming tasks. Preparations were underway for the milking when the drone of an aircraft, unseen in the low lying mists, suddenly increased into a deafening roar, followed immediately by a sound of a huge crash. The daughter of the farm rushed out from the milking shed and saw that the nearby hayshed had been demolished. Her mother ran up to the field on the hillside and saw the wreck of a crashed aircraft, and also the bodies of three members of the crew. The fourth member of the crew was found, dead, further up in the adjoining field the following morning where it had been concealed by a hedge.

The aircraft that had crashed was an American Martin Marauder medium bomber, which normally would have been crewed by seven aircrew. But the total crew on this crashed aircraft consisted of three officers and one Staff Sergeant – all Americans.

The pilot was 1<sup>st</sup> Lt John Walter Reiss of Corpus Christi, Texas, 23 years; 1<sup>st</sup> Lt Eugene M Carby, Northwest, Atlanta, Georgia, 21 years; 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Earl W Shoop, Springdale, Pennsylvania, 26 years; and Technical Sergeant Raymond John Shoemaker, Reading, Pennsylvania, 30 years.

This under manning of the aircraft was to prove significant.

In 1943 there was an increase of American air power in Europe. Ferried over from the United States via two routes, one northerly – the Icelandic Route – and the other a southerly route from Florida, Belan and Natal, Brazil, across to the Ascension Islands, to Dakar, West Africa then to Port Lyautey near Marakesh, Morocco. The last leg of this long route was from Port Lyautey to the United Kingdom. This was the route taken by the Penrhyn Martin Marauder to its destination, St Eval airfield, Cornwall. It left Port Lyautey at 7:15 am on the 4<sup>th</sup> June.

The Marauder is not a small aircraft. It measured 71ft from wing tip to wing tip. It had a length of 58 ft and was 21ft in height. It disintegrated on impact with the hillside above Penrhyn Farm. Parts of the aircraft hurtled on after impact to the fields of the adjoining farms of Barclay and Pant. One of the engines went over 300 yards coming to rest near the Pant Farm house.

The investigation by the authorities into the accident showed that a number of factors connected with the ill-fated flight combined to seal the fate of the crew. The main contributing cause of the disaster was the weather described at the crash scene as "cloud ceiling zero – light rain". But other factors were also crucial and led directly to

the doomed aircraft's destruction and death of its crew.

It is believed there were eight aircraft, flying together in the flight from North Africa to St Eval. There was no radio officer on the crashed aircraft, which had relied on the lead aircraft of the flight for its location. The flight unexpectedly encountered bad weather, which caused the flight to break formation and lose contact with each other. The 'Penrhyn' Marauder was now in serious trouble for it had no W/T radio aids having been totally reliant on the lead aircraft in this regard. Further, the flight had taken off at 7:15 am without waiting for a weather report, which had been due at 7:30am. The 7:30am weather report included instructions to cancel the flight due to adverse weather conditions in the UK. From the de-briefing data available to the Accident Investigation Committee reports of bad weather were not received by the pilot at the point of departure. The pilot expected a cloud ceiling of 1000 feet and visibility of 5 miles at St Eval. In fact, St Eval had a cloud ceiling of only 100 ft and a visibility of a mere 500 yards.

The aircraft was also undermanned. The Investigation Committee made the recommendation 'that aircraft should not be cleared for flight if they have to depend on the radio operator and navigator in the lead aircraft of a flight unless the weather is very good'. The lack of navigational and radio aids of its own proved catastrophic for the Martin Marauder. When it lost contact with the flight leader the persistent foggy weather made a successful landing virtually impossible. Its situation was desperate.

A brief summary of the sequence of events from the report of the Investigating Officer at the scene graphically describes the last moments of the aircraft. "The aircraft



*crashed into the side of the hill, letting down through a solid overcast in strange territory. The aircraft flying at a fairly high rate of speed narrowly missed a farmhouse and hit a tree with the left engine. It then hit a hayrick, probably with the right wing, glanced over a bank, shed the left outboard wing panel, dropped over a bank on the other side of the field and crashed in the centre of the field. The complete demolition of the airplane is an indication of a high rate of speed."*

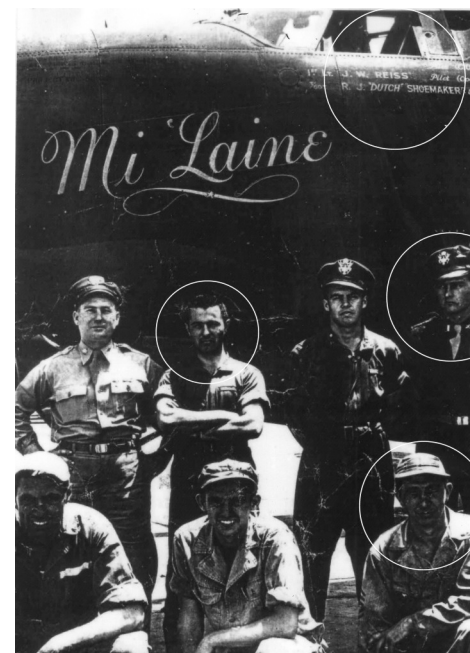
Along with many other curious villagers, I visited the scene of the accident. My abiding recollection is of the crash site being littered with the debris of the aircraft, the aircraft having disintegrated into a shapeless mass beyond recognition.

Of the four crew members, the pilot Reiss and Shoop are buried at the American Military Cemetery at Madingley, Cambridge, England. The bodies of Carby and Shoemaker were disinterred from Brookwood Cemetery near London for final burial in the U.S.A. in 1948, in accordance with the wishes of their families.

In addition to the aircraft which crashed at Pwll, three others of the flight which had left North Africa together, to fly in formation to the airfield at Cornwall, also crashed before reaching their intended destination on that fateful June day. One came down near St Davids, Pembrokeshire – all four crew members being killed. Another made a forced landing on a beach near Drogheda, Southern Ireland – all its crew survived. Another came down in Northern England – the fate of that crew is not known.

On that sombre, sad note the curtain is drawn on a tragic wartime day for so many families in America, which touched Pwll and other locations in these islands. It was a tragedy which perhaps could have been avoided, but the unforeseen intervention of persistently unfavourable flying weather weighed in the balance against a safe arrival at Cornwall. Some of the flyers were indeed fortunate to survive, but many

young American airmen lost their lives that day, far from their homeland, in foreign fields, in the service of their country.



Included in the group photograph are three members of the lost crew of the Pwll crash. Second from the left (back row) is 1<sup>st</sup> Lt J W Reiss. Fourth from the left (back row) is 1<sup>st</sup> Lt E M Carby. R J Shoemaker is the third from left (front row). The fourth member E W Shoop is not included, for he boarded the Martin Marauder in the Ascension Islands. The fates intervened here – the fourth member of the crew, whilst the aircraft was at the Ascension Islands accidentally fell and injured himself, which prevented his continuing with the flight. He was replaced by Shoop. Lady Luck had smiled on the injured crew member: for Shoop it was the kiss of death.

The photograph was probably taken just prior to the departure from the United

States for the U.K. The aircraft in the background is very likely to be the 'Penrhyn' Martin Marauder. Note the pilot's name Reiss and that of Shoemaker painted on the fuselage

The photograph of Lt E W Shoop and the account of his death is an extract from the local newspaper at Springdale, Pennsylvania.



SENT OVERSEAS MAY 3. Second Lt. Earl W. (Bill) Shoop was the fifth Springdale-Cheswick district serviceman reported killed since the outbreak of war. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. E. G. Shoop, 103 Hartrey street, Springdale, and died June 4 as the result of an accident in the European area.

I am indebted to Steven Jones of Cwmafan for his generous help and for giving me the benefit of his expertise in the field of 'crashed aircraft' research, which in no small way facilitated my compiling this account. I also acknowledged the ready assistance given me by the Department of the Army, US Army Human

Resources Command, Alexandria, Virginia, USA.



© D Howell Rees March 2004

(Some of the photographs used in this supplement are representational and do not necessarily reflect the true likeness of any individual or location mentioned in the text).