

William Richard Davis, T-43

18 April 1924 – 2 December 1944

(aged 20)



Lieutenant William R. Davis, 20, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Davis, 667 Hollywood, and a copilot of a Liberator bomber operating out of England, has been unreported since December 2, 1944. He was a veteran of 30 missions over Germany. He left Tech High School here in January, 1943, a few months before he was scheduled for graduation, to enter the Army Air Forces, was commissioned in February, 1944, and went overseas in June.

His father is employed by the Fowler-McCrory Electric Company, and he also has a grandmother, Mrs. C. W. Davis Sr. and three younger brothers.

Information from The Commercial Appeal, Saturday, December 30, 1944.

Lt. William R. Davis, son of Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Davis of 667 Hollywood, was killed in action over Germany on December 2, 1944, according to a War Department telegram. The 20-year-old flier had formerly been reported as missing.

Known to his friends as Bill, Lt. Davis had gone overseas last June and since then had completed 31 missions as copilot of a B-24. He had been awarded the Air Medal and had been a senior at Tech High School when he entered the service in February.

This information from The Commercial Appeal, Thursday, March 29, 1945.

This day would go down in the 392nd's history as one of the roughest missions ever flown in terms of aircraft and aircrew casualties. It would be the highest attrition the Group would ever suffer through the remaining missions of World War II. It was also ironic that the evening of this date, the 200th mission party celebrations for all Enlisted Men of the 392nd was planned. At 0515 and 0640 hours, (18) aircrews were briefed on the target and at 0930, all began their take offs. Two squadrons were put up this day, flying high and low formations off of the 44th Bomb Group at Shipdham. The mission went orderly until the IP (Initial Point – the last navigation way point for a strike aircraft before beginning a bomb run) where heavy clouds were encountered for start of the bomb run.

MISSION LOSS CIRCUMSTANCES: *German Report #KU3483 reported (7) crew members found dead at the plane's crash site at Sargenroth, (5) kilometers east of Kirchberg/Hunsruch at 1250 hours with the remaining (2) men who had bailed out being captured near the same location.*

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTS OF CREWMEN FATES: *One survivor, Sgt Jasinski gave a detailed account of this crew's downing: "While approaching the target, I was throwing out chaff; a few minutes later "bombs away" was given, and a few seconds later we entered a haze (clouds, etc.). Approximately (2) minutes later, we came out of the haze and "enemy*

fighters” was called out. I then went to man my gun at which time we had the first enemy fighter attacks. On this attack Sgt. Kearns, the left waist gunner, was hit in the stomach by enemy 20mm (cannon) fire, tearing a hole in his stomach about the size of a man’s fist. All of the crew members wore flak suits but Sgt. Kearns did not button the bottom three (3) buttons of his flak apron. When he stood up to man his gun, the apron fell away as he was hit. During this first attack, the only other person that I saw was the tail gunner, Sgt. Krause, who had his back to me but was manning his gun. At this time, fire broke out in both bomb bays and the command deck. The radio operator, Sgt. Haney, was talking over the interphone to the pilot and started to say “there is a fire” when he stopped. It is my belief he may have been hit by enemy fire. About this time the enemy fighters were beginning a second run and the pilot gave the word out “this is it, fellows – bail out.” I waited until the tail gunner got back and held the escape hatch open, and I bailed out first. I did not see anyone else bail out after me and do not recall having seen any parachutes dropping while I was descending. To the best of my knowledge, when I bailed out, the airplane seemed to be on fire from aft of the bomb bays to as far as I could see forward, I did not see our plane crash or explode in the air....”

On July 1, 1945, SSgt Jasinski wrote the widow of crewmate TSgt Paul W. Haney: “I am Ray Jasinski, the waist gunner on the same crew as Paul. He may have mentioned my name in one of his long letters to you, I say long because he would start writing them in the morning just after breakfast and write at intervals all during the day and sometimes long into the night. We used to kid him about it!

I have been home for two weeks and would have written sooner but I've been hoping you would have by this time received some encouraging news from the War Department.

I would like to tell you about several things that happened before the mission, such as our (the crews) preparations for the 200th mission party and how we all hoped for a stand down (that there would be no mission scheduled for the next day) but were very disappointed when awakened the next morning for the mission. It seemed everything went wrong that day. Paul couldn't get the radio to work right, which was very unusual. When he finally got the radio to work, the oxygen line sprang a leak. So, we had to change to another ship in whose bomb bays doors I almost got caught when Joe Scalet was testing them.

We finally took off, caught up with our group, and headed for our target. It was a routine mission, target sighted, and bombs dropped, and three minutes later we were hit by fighters. As you probably know, the two waist gunners and the tail gunner on a B-24 are pretty well isolated from the rest of the crew. The only contact we have with them is the interphone. We chatter over this interphone all the time calling out flak, fighters, etc. But from the time we sight the target until about 5 minutes after "bombs away," no one is allowed to chatter over the interphone unless it's an emergency. Well! We were hit in two of the engines. I believe it must have been pretty serious because Lt. Comeau gave us the bail-out orders to all the crew. If there was any way possible of getting that ship back, he would have, because he was tops. The three of us (2 waists and tail) leave through the rear hatch near the tail in case of an emergency while the rest of the crew leave from the forward nosewheel

hatch or the forward bomb bay doors. These exits, at that time, we in the waist could not see. So, we did not know what was going on up forward. I jumped and that was the last I saw of anybody until I met Harold in a German interrogation center. I did not see or meet any other crew member since.

In this letter, Mrs. Haney, I wish I really could have written you some sort of comforting news, but I myself did not know of what happened to any of the other crew members until I arrived home and was told by my sister who has been writing you and the other next of kin of the crew. If there are any questions you feel I could answer for you, please write and ask. I will now close, praying and hoping that you, his wife, and the rest of us who are his friends, will hear encouraging news soon. Ray.

BURIAL RECORDS: *All (7) deceased crew men were buried by the Germans in the village cemetery at Sargenroth, Plot 4, on 4 December. Later interments on U.S. National Overseas Cemetery records indicated the following member reburials: Davis (Grave C-27-17) in the ARDENNES Cemetery, awarded the Air Medal with (3) Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart; Haney (Grave B-7-39) in the LUXEMBOURG Cemetery, awarded the Air Medal with (4) Oak Leaf Clusters and the Purple Heart.*