

Sgt. Robert Hudson – The last 448th man to die during the war

During World War II, 498 men from the 448th Bomb Group lost their lives. Whilst we pay our respects to them and all who fell during the wars, we are going to focus our Remembrance Story on the last man from the 448th Bomb Group to die as a direct result of the war.



The date was 21st February 1944 and the 448th Bomb Group were on a mission to Germany. The target of the day was the airfields at Vorden, Hesepe, and Diepholtz. However, as they approached their target, cloud obscured their view so the Group searched for a target of opportunity. They found Achmer Airfield on the outskirts of Hesepe. As they approached, the sky was filled with a blanket of heavy Flak and they were unable to bomb on their first pass forcing them to fly over the target again. Sgt Robert Hudson, nick-named “*Bombs Away Bob*” was on aircraft #42-7764, piloted by Lt. Hervey Broxton. Robert was placed as a waist gunner for the mission. Approaching the target, a burst of Flak disabled their number three engine. As the flight deck was trying to feather the engine, they started to lag behind and quickly fell out of formation. Meanwhile the rest of the Bomb Group was being attacked by Luftwaffe FW-190’s and two aircraft were lost and others damaged.

Still flying on 3 engines, Robert’s crew arrived over the target alone and dropped their load. “*Dropping out of formation was a signal for the German Focke Wulf 190’s to attack. They came in from all directions.*” Robert recalled in an interview in 1945.

Five FW-190s spotted them and started to attack. Tail Gunner, Sgt Irving Elba fought off the fighters until machine gun fire ripped into his turret disabling his guns and wounding him.

“*I was hit in eight places by flak or explosive 50 mm shells but the injuries weren’t bad enough to take me off my feet.*” Robert stated in his interview.

Robert called the Tail Gunner on the intercom but got no answer. He went back into the tail and dragged the gunner back into the waist of the aircraft. Robert found that the other Waist Gunner had been hit and was on the floor of the plane. He administered first aid to the wounded men, despite being injured himself and for this action; Robert would receive the Distinguished Flying Cross.

After receiving treatment Sgt Elba returned to his turret only to find them out of commission, so he quickly returned to the waist.

Machine gun and cannon fire from the FW-190s quickly destroyed the number four engine and riddled the B-24 from nose to tail. Lt. Broxton repeatedly attempted to feather the number four engine by diving suddenly down but to no avail. These attempts caused the windscreen to fog over reducing visibility to zero. Co-pilot, Lt. Covell opened the side window for visibility, but cannon shells entered the open window and exploded in the dash destroying the flight instruments. The pilots now had no choice but to fly by needle, ball and airspeed.



(Dwight Covell)



With the damage to the engines, the aircraft was sinking fast, hitting an altitude of 200 feet. Lt. Broxton ordered everything to be thrown overboard in an attempt to gain height. The vicious attacks continued and cannon fire ignited hydraulic fluid that had leaked into the bomb bay. The flash fire exploded the bomb bay doors out. Robert, with the help of Sgt. Elba and Lt. Sharp fought to put out the fire. The aircraft continued to lose height despite the efforts.

Without warning a 50mm shell crashed through the plane and exploded at Robert's side. *"I had to lie down then"* Fragments of the shell had torn through one of his kidneys and into his spine. He was paralyzed from the waist down.

"My buddy, the other waist gunner had it in one leg. It looked as if it was over for us so he bailed out. That was the last we saw or heard of him. We were flying so low that we were afraid his silk didn't have time to open. I guess that if I had been able to move I would have bailed out too" That waist gunner was Sgt Henry Kubinski. Sadly, he did not survive; a Dutch family recovered his body from a river near Ommen, Holland.



(Henry Kubinski)

The five FW-190s continued to pelt the aircraft until they ran out of ammunition, but the B-24 continued to fly on. The German fighters could not believe this wreck was still airborne. Lt. Broxton saw one of the German fighter pilots smile and waved as he and the other FW-190s peeled off to return to base, out of fuel and ammunition. Robert's crew was still not out of danger. They still had the North Sea and the 120 mile journey home to contend with on only two working engines. Would the engines hold on? Would they have enough fuel to make it back?

As they skimmed over the North Sea, the uninjured crewmates continue to strip the aircraft coaxing their aircraft to reach the height of 500 feet by the time they reached the English coast. As they reached Seething they were lacking hydraulic power and the wheels were lowered by hand. They had no radio or means of communication and worst they had no brakes and a severed right rudder. This homecoming was going to take all the skills and energy the crew had left, in order to land their aircraft.

"We signalled with red flares that there were wounded aboard as we came into land, which should have given us a clear field, but another plane was in trouble too, so we fought for the runway. The other pilot had more engines than we, so he got in first and we landed off the runway and ended up in a field."



Rescue personnel quickly extinguished the fire that continued to burn in the number four engine and attended to the wounded. The battered aircraft contained over 400 holes of variable sizes, an unexploded shell in one fuel tank and a severed right rudder. A visiting war correspondent quickly named the aircraft BAG OF BOLTS. It never flew again.

As for Robert, he was hospitalised in England for over a month then repatriated to America and to the Halloran General Hospital in New York where he received physical therapy. He was then moved to Schick General Hospital in Clinton, Iowa for rehabilitation where he was taught to use a walking machine. Afterwards he was transferred to the Mayo General Hospital at Galesburg.



By Christmas 1944 Robert had improved significantly and he was able to move his legs sufficiently for him to use a “walker”, so he was able to go home for 17 days. Robert continued to fight on and celebrated VE Day 1945, but sadly this celebration was short lived, as on the 30th August 1945 he passed away as a direct result of his combat injuries. On the day of his passing he had only just celebrated his 22nd birthday. He left behind his Mother, Father and Brother.

It is said that you die twice. Once when you actually die and again when you are forgotten. Remembrance Day is a time to observe, reflect and honour those who not only died but also survived in the line of duty.

Sgt. Robert E Hudson was part of Crew 71, 715th Bomb Squadron. His crew included:-

2nd. Lt. Hervey E. Broxton - Pilot
2nd. Lt. Dwight W. Covell – Co-pilot
2nd. Lt. Robert F. Fauerbach - Navigator
2nd. Lt. Clair E. Sharp - Bombardier
Sgt. Donald V. Birdsall - Engineer
Sgt. Joe K. Corziatti – Radio Operator
Sgt. Robert E. Hudson - Gunner
Sgt. Keith C. Tindall - Gunner
Sgt. Irving Elba - Gunner
Sgt. Henry Kubinski - Gunner

Lest We Forget