

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Captain Robert A. Hockin Navigator USAAF

Robert Hockin, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hockin of Marquette, was educated in Marquette schools before enlisting on December 18, 1941. He completed his training at Kelly Field, Texas where he won his silver wings and a commission as Second Lieutenant.

He was assigned to the Eighth Air Force as a navigator on a Flying Fortress named "Short Stride" based in England. In completing 25 missions, Short Stride made headlines time and again.

In participating in a raid over Kiel, Germany, Hockin shot down a Folke Wolfe fighter and described its fall into the sea.

Later, in another raid, his plane became separated from the echelon by 10 miles when attacked by four Messerschmitts simultaneously. The Short Stride gunners responded by destroying all four Nazi planes in five minutes.

On July 20, 1943 Ralph McGill, executive editor of the Atlanta Constitution, wrote the following story after watching a badly banged up Flying Fortress return following a strange battle with a rubber raft and its own bombs. Its landing occurred 15 minutes after other flight

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members reported in the briefing room that Short Stride could be written off as destroyed. When last seen, the plane was in an almost vertical dive at a speed too great for the wings to stay on or for control to be regained.

This was almost true. As the Fortress was fighting its way through about 200 German fighters near the coast of Germany, bullets struck the door behind which they kept one of the rubber rafts. The large raft was thrown out and wrapped itself about the right rudder.

The Fortress promptly flipped over on its back. This was at 23,000 feet. The plane promptly roared down on its back and in almost a vertical dive, but at 11,000 feet Pilot Shelton managed by terrific pulls on the rudder to bring it out of the dive.

This was too much for the bomb load. It broke loose from its pins and was flying violently against the top of the plane. Bombs then crashed back down with such force they burst through the steel bomb bay and took part of each side of the ship with them. Everyone on the plane felt it was broken in two, but it held together.

Hardly had the craft been righted when it slid over into another dive. Hockin started to crawl through an escape hatch and had gotten half way through when Shelton yelled back that he had the plane under temporary control. Sergeant Christen of Merced, California, grabbed Hockin and pulled him back into the ship.

All of the men were half dazed. They had been flung about the ship, and ammunition boxes and equipment had been flung about with them. They were bruised and swollen as if they had finished a hard losing boxing match.

The plane was under control, but barely so. The tail with the rubber raft wrapped about

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one rudder was heavy. One engine was in bad shape, and the propeller was knocking badly and would not feather.

Meantime, the ship was flying on, losing altitude. Another engine began to knock and vibrate so that Shelton had difficulty holding the controls.

They managed the English shore and continued toward their base. Over the field, Shelton told the crew he couldn't cut his engine because of the weight on the tail. He told them they could bail out if they wished.

Bruised, battered and a bit bloody they said, "Hell no lieutenant, you pulled us this far. We'll go in with you".

Shelton brought the clattering Fortress around and aimed her in. As the wheels touched, a propeller came off and slashed three-fourths of the way through the fuselage, almost cutting the plane in half. The crew piled out, the mission over.

On discharge, Hockin was promoted to Captain, received the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters, and the Purple Heart.

In Marquette, he joined his wife and a five-month old daughter, Carol Ann, whom he saw for the first time.

TJ Mudge, May 2004