

Robert Davis: One day I was in a line hut on the flight line where we on the line crew stayed during flight line duty. A P-38 landed and the pilot taxied the plane toward the line hut and as he taxied toward the hut he applied the airplane brakes prior to turning the plane to face the runway for parking. As he did this, the nose of the plane dipped down and then rose up. As it rose up a burst of 50 caliber machine gun bullets flew over the top of the line hut. Apparently the gun switch had been activated during the flight and the pilot had inadvertently pressed the firing button on the control column during the braking procedure. Fortunately for us, the guns went off when the nose of the plane was rising and not dipping. My notes name the errant pilot as a Lieutenant T. S. Brown.

On June 16th, 1946 [correction made per Mr. Davis, May 23, 2008] a B-24 from the 404th Bomb Squadron crashed on Shemya. The bomber was returning from a week long mission. It had stopped at Naknek for fuel and as it approached Shemya at 0100 hours it was confronted with a dense fog and medium wind. It circled over Shemya for two and a half hours attempting to locate the runway. At approximately 0328 the aircraft plunged into the quartermaster area of Shemya after most, if not all, of the crew had bailed out.

There were three survivors of the eight man crew: the First Lieutenant Herbert Augustine suffered a sprained ankle; Sergeant John Croan was released from the hospital having had no injuries; and PFC Henry Earll received burns about the arms and face. Killed in the crash were the 404th Bomb Squadron's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel John Lawson, Lieutenant Philip Holtusky, First Lieutenant Hilger, Staff Sergeant Throop, and PFC Ellerbee.

Lieutenant Augustine reported they had made a half a dozen passes at the field and came down to 200 feet where they saw lights but they couldn't safely come lower. The overcast began at 2500 feet and they jumped between 3000 and 4000 feet. One crew member reported seeing the pilot don his parachute and saw three men in the waist with their chutes on. Lieutenant Augustine said that he landed on the shore on the west end of the island about 10 feet from the water. Sergeant Crone landed in Hillside Cemetery.

Soon after it was learned that the crew was going to bail out, all available on the island were summoned to watch for parachutists. A glare which reddened the fog over the quartermaster area told where the aircraft crashed. The plane disintegrated over many hundred yards and burned down a large warehouse. The nearest hut to the warehouse was 40 feet away. The largest part of the B-24 found was a section of a wing tip less than 12 feet long which dwarfed the remaining wreckage. A human hand with a ring on it and a foot were found near the airplane. A pair of flight gloves was found in the water and a part of a chest parachute was found near the main runway.

The next day after the crash I went to the crash site, the smoldering ruins of the warehouse contained the islands supply of coca-cola and beer. Around the foundation of the warehouse standing shoulder to shoulder were soldiers with broom handles fitted with nooses attempting to snare whatever was left of the libations.

The body of PFC Ellerby was found in the water on June 16th. Apparently he landed some distance out to sea and was washed ashore as the area where his body was found was searched

soon after the crew bailed out. The tiny islands of Alaid and Niski were also searched. A GCA ground controlled approach system was in place on Shemya but was inoperative at the time. Several P-38 pilots reportedly volunteered to take off and attempt to lead the B-24 down but their request was denied.