

during the forced landing by the impact of the crash. Not one of the crew was injured.³⁴

The German anti-aircraft artillery units found the crashed bomber almost immediately with their searchlights. Klette and his men ran away from the plane when machine gunners opened fire on the wreck of the aircraft. They then dropped flat and lay still until the lights went out again. The crew were forced to escape from the area as quickly as possible. Therefore they got up and raced towards the edge of the field.³⁵ At this stage they had no idea where they were going or what awaited them in the darkness ahead. In the meantime the Germans began moving towards the crashed aircraft in a circle, firing pistol shots to illuminate the area. Three crew members, L.E.D. Winchester, H.J. Brown and H.R. Upton were hit by German fire in the process. Winchester was wounded in the buttock, Upton in the thigh and Brown in his back.³⁶ There was no hope of escape for Klette and his crew and one by one they stood up with hands held high. They were all captured that night by the Germans. Warrant Officer Brown was seen alive for the last time when he was carried into a bomb shelter on a stretcher.³⁷ He was never seen or heard from again.³⁸

The rest of the crew were taken to a large bunker and then they were driven to the German headquarters in a country house somewhere outside Warsaw. Later that night they were transported by trucks to a very old prison, where they were locked up in separate dingy cells for the night. The next day Klette was taken by tram to a station, then by train to Lodz, where he was intensely interrogated by the Germans. Finally he was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in the east, near Breslau.³⁹ Warrant Officer Winchester was taken to a prison camp in Warsaw. He was later detained in a German interrogation centre for 15 days

³⁴ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.106.

³⁵ N.D. Orpen, *Airlift to Warsaw: The Rising of 1944*, p.100.

³⁶ R.R. Klette, Telephonic interview, Somerset West, 13 December 1984.

³⁷ N.D. Orpen, *Airlift to Warsaw: The Rising of 1944*, p.106.

³⁸ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.106.

³⁹ R.R. Klette, Telephonic interview, Somerset West, 13 December 1984.

and then transferred from one prisoner-of-war camp to another. He was detained in solitary confinement for three weeks. The crew of this Liberator was later reunited at the Luchenwalde camp, approximately 40 kilometres south of Berlin. Here Winchester met Norval, the pilot, who left his crew behind, when he jumped out of Liberator EW138 K above Warsaw on the night of the 13 August. Winchester later escaped from the Luchenwalde camp and after walking for ten days reached a motorized column of the United States Army on 23 April 1945. He was taken to Hildesheim from where, ten days later, he flew to Rheims, then to Brussels and then to Britain.⁴⁰

Major S.S. Urry was the pilot of Liberator KG838 H. As a result of technical problems which developed in Number 3 engine, Urry was forced to turn back to Brindisi.⁴¹

Liberator KG939 A had Captain I.J.M. Odendaal as pilot. On its way to Warsaw, heavy anti-aircraft fire was observed at Cracow, together with three or four searchlights. Five light anti-aircraft guns were observed. A white rotating beacon was seen in the vicinity of Kielce. Owing to bad weather, Warsaw could not be located and the 12 metal containers were jettisoned. The Liberators could only take on enough fuel to fly to Warsaw and back. If any navigational problems were experienced, which meant that they were not able to find the target, the metal containers had to be abandoned to decrease the weight to enable them to reach the home base. The fact that the supplies were not dropped on Warsaw, however, does not diminish the danger involved in this flight. Night fighters, anti-aircraft batteries, searchlights and bad weather caused this crew to experience terrifying moments during their 11-hour flight.⁴²

During the flight to Warsaw, the crew of Liberator KG 872 V, piloted by Lieutenant R. Franklin, observed various flares. At Cracow, six to ten heavy anti-aircraft and at Warsaw, an unidentified aircraft, which was slowly flying with its lights on, were spotted. The Liberator approached the city from the Vistula in the direction of the first bridge. When the bomb doors of the aircraft were

40 Winchester returned to South Africa after the war and was elected to Parliament in 1966, as a United Party candidate; L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.107.

41 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54232.

42 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, Union War History, Container 140, p.5567.

opened, some of the metal containers fell out into the river. The rest of the containers were later dropped over unidentified areas. Home base was reached safely.⁴³

Extremely bad weather conditions were experienced by Captain F.C. Serfontein and his crew of Liberator KG941 Q. This caused them to be approximately 28 kilometres off course to the west of their designated flight path. The danger involved in the flight was increased as a result of this, as they now had to fly over mountains instead of plains. The altitude was increased to approximately 300 - 400 metres and at this height extremely dense cloud formations were experienced. Visibility was almost zero. The conditions rapidly deteriorated as electric storms and hailstorms were encountered. As a result, Serfontein was forced to turn back after he had already flown over the Carpathian Mountain range.⁴⁴ The 12 metal containers with supplies were jettisoned overboard. The Liberator returned safely to Brindisi.⁴⁵

Although fairly bad weather was experienced on its way to Warsaw, the flight of Liberator KG871 F, with Captain G.A.P. Greindl at the controls, went smoothly. A flashing light was noticed in the Adriatic sea. The object was later identified by means of radio communication as a rubber dinghy. Several beacons north-east of Cracow and an aircraft taking off were observed.⁴⁶ Air-to-air fire was noticed approximately 16 kilometres to the port side, but no resulting incidents were observed. When they arrived over Warsaw, there was a great deal of smoke and many fires were noticed. Large parts of the city centre were burning. Searchlights were seen from Saska Kepa to the river. The supplies were not dropped in the city centre zones, because this area was covered in flames.

All 12 metal containers were dropped but only five parachutes opened and according to calculations the supplies were dropped in zones A or B.⁴⁷ The landing position of the other metal containers could not be determined.

⁴³ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54239.

⁴⁴ J.R. Coleman, Personal interview, Cape Town, 7 December 1984.

⁴⁵ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54235.

⁴⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54238.

⁴⁷ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54238.

Medium and light anti-aircraft batteries were noticed approximately six kilometres south-east of the target. Fire continued periodically, mainly from the border lines and the vicinity of zones A, B and C.

Several explosions coming from the medium anti-aircraft positions on the west bank at the first bridge were also observed. A possibility existed that a rocket launcher had been positioned at the end of the approach. The crew experienced a few anxious moments when the aircraft was caught in searchlights for a short period of time. Very bad weather conditions were encountered, but Greindl succeeded in avoiding a threatening storm. Early in the morning they passed over Logostini and 12 flashes from what may possibly have been light anti-aircraft fire and one searchlight were noticed. The home base at Brindisi was reached at daybreak.⁴⁸

Many of the Liberators were badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire and several panels riddled with bullet holes. Parachutes were often shot to shreds during the flights and hence unusable.⁴⁹

5.2.2 178 SQUADRON RAF

All the Liberators of 178 Squadron RAF, except one, flew from Brindisi to Warsaw but landed at Amendola when they returned. Liberator KG938 landed at Brindisi like the aircraft of 31 Squadron. Most of these return flights to Warsaw took more than ten hours.⁵⁰

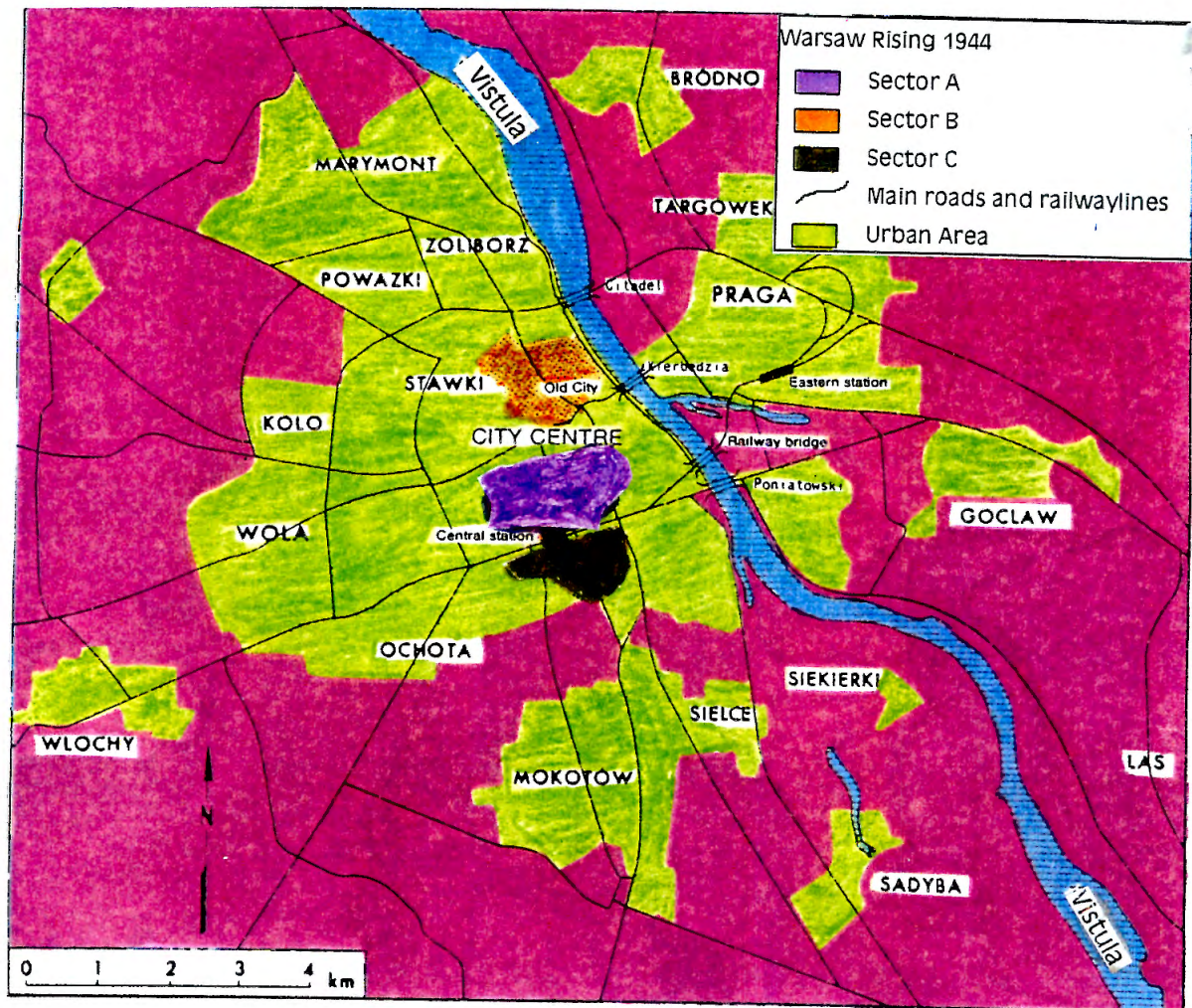
Liberator EV961 was carrying containers of mixed supplies to Warsaw. The aircraft crashed after the supplies had been dropped. The experience of Sergeant H.V. Lloyd Lyne, the only survivor of this aircraft was found in a document at the Ministry of Defence in London.⁵¹

48 J.R. Coleman, Personal interview, Cape Town, 7 December 1984.

49 J.R. Coleman, Personal interview, Cape Town, 7 December 1984.

50 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996: Report 12-14 August 1944, p.9.

51 British Ministry of Defence, London, Air Historical Branch, File 13: Air supply for Warsaw, n.d.



WARSAW RISING 1944: MAP INDICATING SECTORS A, B, C. (WHERE THE PARTISANS INDICATED THE DROPPING ZONES)

Upon reaching Warsaw, the bomber flew from south to north along the Vistula River in the direction of the Citadel, which served as a landmark. When the supplies had been dropped in the area of Kiasinski Square and Miodowa Street, the engines of the Liberator were already on fire but the plane still managed to cross the Vistula and crashed in the park close to the small Lake Kaminokowski. All of the six air crew were killed except for Lyne.⁵² He was wounded in both legs and fell unconscious. It is difficult to establish today whether he was thrown from the plane or whether he parachuted. He thought that the Germans had fished him out of the Vistula, but most probably he had fallen into Lake Kaminokowski. He was taken to a German military hospital in the region of Modlin and was afterwards transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp in the area of Rostock. There he remained until the end of the war when he was liberated by the Soviet Army.⁵³

Liberator EW233 was piloted by Lieutenant T.D. Potgieter, an officer of the SAAF. Due to bad weather conditions the target in Warsaw could not be identified and all containers were brought back to Amendola.⁵⁴

Liberator EW264's crew were unable to find Warsaw due to navigational difficulties and had to turn back. Before returning to Amendola the containers were jettisoned at 3 000 metres north of the Danube river.⁵⁵

Liberator KG942 encountered very intense turbulence in the Cracow area. Weather conditions were so bad that the pilot decided to jettison the supplies. The containers were dropped some ten miles east of Cracow. On the return flight to Italy, heavy anti-aircraft fire, heavy explosions and a searchlight were observed near Cracow.⁵⁶

When Liberator KG828, piloted by Flight Officer P.J. Boothman, arrived over Warsaw, a great deal of smoke and many large fires were observed. Due to

52 British Ministry of Defence, London, Air Historical Branch, File 13: Air supply for Warsaw, n.d.

53 British Ministry of Defence, London, Air Historical Branch, File 13: Air supply for Warsaw, n.d.

54 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.9.

55 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.9.

56 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

haze and smoke the dropping zones could not be identified. At least 20 heavy anti-aircraft guns and 20 light anti-aircraft guns were seen operating in Warsaw. At 120 metres, smoke still obscured the target. Between Cracow and Warsaw and near Novi Pazar, several searchlights were seen. Many flares were observed at Warsaw but not a single German fighter aircraft was seen. As the target area could not be identified, all the containers with supplies were brought back to base.⁵⁷

On their way to Warsaw, the crew of Liberator KG838 saw German fighter aircraft in the vicinity of the Carpathian Mountains. Upon their arrival over Warsaw, they identified the first bridge. The containers were dropped on Warsaw in the area where they saw a cross with an arrow pointing to it. Approximately 30 light anti-aircraft guns together with six searchlights were observed. The Liberator was hit by anti-aircraft fire and Sergeant P.J. London, the flight engineer, was wounded. Although the aircraft was damaged, the crew managed to fly back safely to their home base at Amendola.⁵⁸

Reaching Warsaw, the crew of Liberator KG933 saw the Citadel bridge. Anti-aircraft fire and explosions were seen all around them. All the containers were dropped in the centre of the area where a cross could be seen. On their return, light anti-aircraft fire was encountered but they reached Amendola safely.⁵⁹

Arriving at Warsaw, the crew of Liberator EW160 saw two bridges but could not find the target. The cross, observed by the other crews, could not be found. The containers were dropped on an area determined by the crew to be the correct zone and parachutes were seen to open. Much light anti-aircraft fire was observed in the vicinity of the Citadel. Heavy anti-aircraft fire and some searchlights were observed from the Russian side of the river. The aircraft, coned by searchlights, was slightly damaged by light anti-aircraft fire. A double beacon and a runway were observed. A signal flashing the letters "K" and "E" with a white light was seen in this area.⁶⁰ The aircraft returned safely to its base.

57 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

58 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

59 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

60 Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

The Citadel bridge was also identified by the crew of Liberator KG938 when they reached Warsaw. The containers were dropped in the centre of the dropping zone. Unlike the other aircraft, Liberator KG938 landed at Brindisi and not at Amendola.⁶¹

Liberator KG873 was the last aircraft of 178 Squadron to drop its containers on Warsaw in the vicinity of the bridges, where a lot of rubble was seen below. This aircraft also reached Amendola safely.⁶²

5.2.3 148 SQUADRON RAF

Seven crews of 148 Squadron RAF were detailed to drop supplies to the partisan groups fighting in Warsaw but, due to unserviceability, three of these aircraft failed to take off. Only two of the other four Halifaxes were successful and dropped supplies on Warsaw. These aircraft flew from Brindisi and returned there. The return flight took them less than ten hours.

Halifax JP295 carried nine containers and six packages, which were dropped to the partisans in Warsaw.⁶³ Halifax JN926 also carried nine containers and six packages. The supplies were dropped over the correct zone. Both aircraft returned safely to Brindisi.

Owing to rain, poor visibility and lack of pinpoints, the target could not be located by Halifax JP254. The aircraft returned to base with its supplies.⁶⁴

Halifax EB197 left Brindisi but unfortunately the aircraft could not gain sufficient height to cross the mountains of Yugoslavia and had to return to its home base after three hours of flight.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

⁶² Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.9.

⁶³ Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.9.

⁶⁴ Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.7.

⁶⁵ Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.7.

5.3 CONTINUED EFFORTS

A total of 24 sorties was flown on the night of 13-14 August. Seven of the ten Liberators of 31 Squadron SAAF managed to reach Warsaw but two did not return to their home base. Ten Liberators of 178 Squadron RAF participated. Although eight Liberators succeeded in reaching Warsaw, only six aircraft dropped their containers successfully. Two did not reach Warsaw and one did not return to base. Two of the seven Halifaxes of 148 Squadron dropped supplies to the partisans in Warsaw during this night.⁶⁶

The next day, 205 Group was informed that they had to continue with the delivery of supplies to Warsaw for an indefinite period.⁶⁷ Lieutenant-Colonel J.A. Williams, Officer Commanding 2 Wing, was notified that in an attempt to shorten the distance to Warsaw, the squadrons would be allowed to take off from the airfield at Foggia. The route would therefore differ slightly from that of the previous night. They would fly from Celone or Foggia to the Adriatic Sea, then over the Scutari lake in Albania, northerly over Yugoslavia, across the Danube to Hungary and Czechoslovakia and then over the Carpathian Mountains for the last leg to Warsaw.⁶⁸ Although Stalin officially refused permission for Allied flights over areas controlled by the Soviet Union, it was nevertheless decided to approach Warsaw from a north-eastern direction in order to avoid enemy defence positions.

In a personal account, Brigadier Jimmy Durrant recounted how, on the morning of 14 August, he flew with a communications aircraft from Celone to Kaserta to call on Air Marshall Sir John Slessor⁶⁹ regarding these continued supply flights to Warsaw.

He was concerned about 205 Group's part in the Warsaw operation. At that stage the Group had been participating in the important task of laying sea-mines in the Danube, to prevent cargo ships from reaching the enemy. Durrant

⁶⁶ see chapter 10, Table 2.

⁶⁷ N.D. Orpen, *Airlift to Warsaw: The Rising of 1944*, p.94.

⁶⁸ L. Isemonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.95; Anon. "SAAF Heroes in Warsaw Airlift", *Paratus*, Vol 34, No.9, September 1983, p.23.

⁶⁹ Sir John Slessor succeeded Lieutenant-General C. Spaatz and became Officer Commanding, Mediterranean and Middle East, on 14 January 1944; H.J. Martin & N.D. Orpen, *Eagles Victorious*, p.97.

pointed out that this operation had been so successful that the Air Marshall had sent a signal congratulating him on the success of the operation.

According to Slessor's assessment, the Danube operation had been more successful than any other single operation of the entire Italian campaign.⁷⁰

Upon arriving at Slessor's office, his secretary indicated he was busy with important discussions and could not be disturbed. Durrant decided to wait and only later in the morning did Slessor appear from the office.

Durrant again referred to the successes of the Danube operations. He argued there was a shortage of aircraft and crew and reported a 30% loss without significant successes the previous night. He enquired whether it would not be better to use their aircraft exclusively for flights such as the Danube operations, rather than allowing them to be shot down during reckless operations such as the Warsaw flights.

Slessor listened to Durrant's argument in silence, excused himself and walked back to his office. He returned moments later and invited Durrant inside, where Durrant was introduced to Slessor's guest, Winston Churchill.

Churchill asked him to present his case and Durrant repeated his argument. Churchill listened patiently and then argued that from a military point of view, he could not agree more. But, from a political point of view, the supply simply had to continue. After the interview Slessor indicated to Durrant he would personally address the crew of 205 Group.⁷¹

Definite assumptions can be made from this conversation between Durrant and Churchill. Firstly, it can now be assumed that the British press was absolutely correct when it stated that the Warsaw operations were more politically inspired than militarily justifiable. Secondly, it can clearly be seen that strategical considerations which usually determine the final results of the war, did not apply in this instance and did not play any role whatsoever.

70 J.T. Durrant, Personal interview, Johannesburg, 14 June 1983.

71 J.T. Durrant, Personal interview, Johannesburg, 14 June 1983.



THE FLIGHT ROUTE FROM BASES IN ITALY TO WARSAW AND BACK

The South African squadrons had much success with their operations at the Danube, but were now involved in a very hazardous venture, transporting supplies to Warsaw. In this operation they only had a 30% success rate. Therefore, from a military point of view, this operation should have been reconsidered immediately. Usually, when so many casualties occur, the operation turns out to be a military disaster and should be reconsidered or cancelled. In the conversation with Churchill, Durrant evaluated the operation from a military point of view but Churchill looked at it from a political angle. He believed that it was imperative for the Allies to render assistance to the Polish people.

A further implication that we have to consider is the fact that this operation placed the lives of many aircrews in jeopardy. The fact that Durrant flew to Kaserta to negotiate with Slessor shows clearly that he was very concerned with this state of affairs. He realised that his aircrews were forced into a futile operation where they were killed for no reason at all.