

*Bomber
Legends*



A Flight Never to be Forgotten

Photograph by Bill Crump

“Bluie West One, Where Are You? We’re Coming In!”

By: Newt Moy

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In January 1945, on a flight from Dow Field in Maine to Goose Bay, Labrador, we had a malfunction of the fuel valve on the outer right wing fuel tank (tokyo). The valve was not repairable at Goose Bay, which resulted in our inability to take on a full fuel load for nonstop flight to Iceland. Therefore, we had to make shorter flights to Greenland, Iceland, and Scotland.

When we were briefed on our flight to Greenland, we were shown photos of the entrance to three fjords. The center fjord would lead us 50 miles into the mountains where the airfield (Bluie West One) was located. This was in January when there were only a couple of hours of daylight, so we had to arrive at the entrance to the fjord at sunup for a visual flight into the fjord to the airfield.

On our flight from Goose Bay, over the Davis Strait to Greenland, we were over an undercast and could not see the Greenland coastline for a visual fix on the entrance to the proper fjord. At this time, Charlie Berthoud, our navigator, advised he had lost contact with the radio beacon (BW-3) at the entrance to the fjord. At this point, our visibility was limited and we had to make a quick decision on what to do because we had no way of knowing how far we were from the coastline as the clouds below us blended right into the ice and snow on the mountains.

I contacted BW-1 traffic control for the status of the radio beacon at BW-3 and was advised the beacon had suddenly gone off the air with no chance of immediate repair. There were no other navigational aids available and our only choice was to return to Goose Bay, our preplanned alternate (No one wanted to return to Goose Bay with temperatures of 30 to 40 degrees below zero.

As I was about to get a flight clearance back to Goose Bay, BW-1 traffic control advised that a C-54 transport plane had just departed the airfield and should be rising through the undercast in our vicinity and to contact the pilot for advice on weather conditions in the fjords. At that moment, Archie Kritchman (co-pilot) saw the C-54 rising out of the clouds below. I contacted the pilot and he advised the ceiling was high enough for a CFR (contact flight rules) with good lateral visibility. Since we were fairly close to the coastline he advised we could descend through the undercast away from the coastline to reach CFR conditions.

All went well until we returned to the coastline looking for the fjord leading to BW-1, the airfield. That is where our

real problems began. All we could rely on was our visual recognition of the photos we were shown at the briefing to identify the proper fjord. Our problem was becoming further compounded by the lowering ceiling restricting our visibility to see the coastline.

We entered a fjord and thanks for photographic memory of Ken McLaughlin (bombardier) and Charlie, we realized we had entered the fjord which was to the left of the one we should have entered. At this point width of the fjord was too narrow to allow us to turn around and the ceiling was too low to allow us to climb out because of the high mountains on both sides. Our only choice was to continue flying up the fjord hoping we would not miss seeing a channel that crossed over to the fjord leading us to BW-1. The ceiling was continuing to close down on us and it was just like flying in a tunnel, with rocks on both sides. I flew as close as possible to the left side of the fjord because I had to make a full 90-degree turn as soon as we reached the crossover channel. That was the sweetest 90-degree turn I ever made in a B-17.

As we entered the correct fjord, we recognized a positive fix which was about 25 miles from the airfield. As we got a little closer to the airfield, we came into radio contact with the tower. The operator advised us to abort the approach, the weather was below minimum. At that moment we flew over a positive fix, a sunken ship in the fjord, and we advised that we were proceeding to the base. At that point we had no safe way out. Shortly after we landed and parked the aircraft, the visibility was zero-zero.

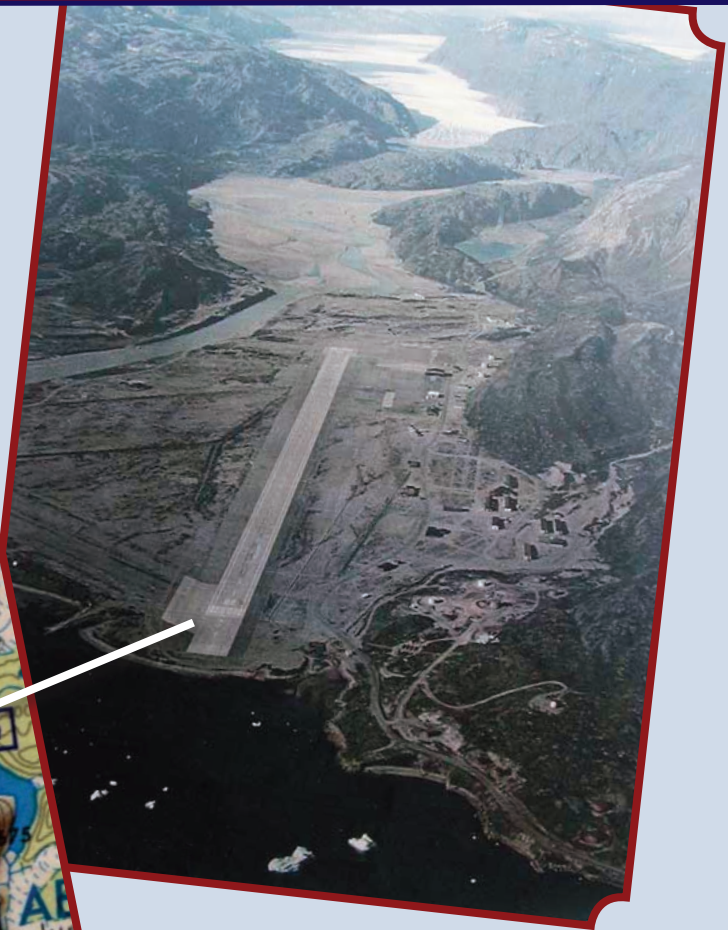
The other crew members on the flight were: Joe Joseph, Homer Roades, Benny Bracia, Bill Wight and Robert Notarpole.

I attribute our success to the ability of the flight crew to recall the briefing we had at Goose Bay and, specifically the photos we were shown of the fjords leading to the airfield. I might add that seeking the advice of another aircrew was an acceptable procedure in the WWII era.

In June 1945 (after VE Day) I returned to the States via Greenland and BW-1. I had a clear view of the fjords from 13,000 feet (minimum altitude over the icecap) and the thought that I had been flying in the fjords under 500-foot ceiling to BW-1, etched a memory in my mind that will never be forgotten.

...Photos on next page

“Bluie West One...



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Left: This photo taken from the orbiting space station shows the vastness of the area around Bluie West One. Navigation had to be precise.

(Photo from space courtesy of the Image Analysis Laboratory, NASA Johnson Space Center.)