



USAAF Liberator “Tommy Thumper II” crashes in Old Catton on 22nd January 1945.



Tommy Thumper II was a B-24 Liberator in the 467th heavy bomb group, 790th bomber squadron, stationed at RAF Rackheath, north-east of Norwich. It's serial number was 42-94811 and it originally served with the 34th bomb group at Mendlesham in Suffolk.

During August and September 1944, the 34th group replaced its B-24s with B-17s, so Tommy Thumper II was moved to the 803rd (P) Radio Counter Measures Bomb Squadron based at Cheddington, Hertfordshire. In early January 1945, Tommy Thumper II was transferred to the 467th bomb group at Rackheath in Norfolk.

It was named Tommy Thumper II after the original Tommy Thumper B-24 was badly damaged during a hard landing. The crew of the original Tommy Thumper took charge of another B-24 and named it Tommy Thumper II.

On the 22nd January 1945, Captain John T. McArthur Jr. took charge of Tommy Thumper II for a training mission. The aircraft took off from RAF Rackheath in the early afternoon. Not long after take off, at about 13:45, Captain McArthur radioed the tower at Rackheath stating that he had engine problems. The tower instructed McArthur to return to the airfield.



The aircraft was sighted near to Horsham St. Faith airfield (now Norwich airport). Number 1 propeller appeared to be feathered and there were bursts of smoke coming from the number 2 engine. Things must have become serious as McArthur radioed the tower at the nearer Horsham St Faith airfield. He was instructed to circle until another aircraft was landed. Then, at about 13:56, flying at a height of about 400 feet, the aircraft appeared to stall, did a complete wing over, and spun into the ground. It crashed in the grounds of Catton Hall, near Church Street in Old Catton.

All nine crew members died.



An aerial view of the crash scene in Catton Park – just opposite the school.

An official investigation was carried out by the USAAF, but because the aircraft was completely destroyed and none of the crew survived, no reason was ever given for the crash.



John T. McArthur, Jr.
Pilot

James R. Prendergast
Co Pilot

Otto W. Stokes
Navigator

William E. Walker
Engineer

John F. O'Malley
Radio Operator

C.J. Rachford
Armorer and
Gunner

Floyd W. Erickson
Assistant Engineer
and Gunner

Denver C. Loberg
Assistant Radio
Operator and Gunner

Frank C. Wassow
Assistant Armorer
and Gunner

This photograph is the Tommy Thumper II crew just before they departed for England and active duty. Denver C. Loberg (mentioned above) was part of the original crew but he was tragically killed on Christmas Eve 1944 when, returning from a bombing mission over Germany, he fell from the bomb bay somewhere north of Norwich whilst trying to salvage some bombs that were armed but had failed to drop. Leonard B. Rostkowski joined the McArthur crew to replace Denver Loberg.



This page is a memorial and tribute to the nine crew-men (listed below) who gave their lives in the line of duty and in defence of the freedom that many of us now take for granted.

The roll of honour for the crew of USAAF Liberator "Tommy Thumper II" who sadly died in Catton Park, Old Catton on the 22nd January 1945.

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Half way along Church Street in Old Catton is a memorial plaque. Many people walking through the historic heart of the Old Catton stop, read the inscription, and then move on without knowing more about the two US bombers or the pilots that gave their lives in early 1945. This article has been researched and produced to keep the memory of these brave souls alive.

Interestingly, the memorial plaque in Church Street mentions 20 valuable lives lost as a result of this and the "A Dog's Life" crash. But from the official crash reports, 18 crew men died, not 20. There were no civilian casualties as a result of these accidents. The reason for this disparity may lie in the fact that the initial crew of a B-24 consisted of 10 men. But later on in the war, this was reduced to 9 men when the ball turret was removed. Even after that turret was removed, some B-24's flew with 10 crew and others flew with 9. In the case of one bomber, "A Dogs' Life", the reason was simpler and the crew member – Norman Cameron - very lucky!

It would seem that at the time the memorial in Old Catton was commissioned, no one checked the crash reports. As no names are given on the memorial, someone must have presumed that the aircraft were each flying with a ten-man crew.



The Church Street memorial plaque.



Larger versions of the photographs in this article, together with additional photographs and copies of the USAAF crash reports can be viewed in the photo archive at www.oldcatton.com.

We are extremely grateful to the nephews of Otto Stokes, Dan and Bill Herrman, for contacting this website and also to their family for providing us with and allowing us to publish this photograph of the Tommy Thumper II crew. They have asked us to point out that it has not been possible to trace or contact the relatives of the other crew members shown in this photograph and it is sincerely hoped that no offence or upset is caused to them by publishing this photograph.

We are also grateful to Andy Wilkinson and his website at www.the467tharchive.org for the additional information about Denver Loberg and to Cecil Lee for his assistance.