6.1 THE WARSAW FLIGHTS OF 14-15 AUGUST 1944

6.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sub-Lieutenant M. Molonotski and a number of Polish liaison officers, who were all members of the Balkan Air Force, were sent to Celone on 14 August with the task of assisting 31 Squadron SAAF, 178 Squadron and 148 Squadron RAF, with flights to deliver provisions to the besieged Polish people at Warsaw. Molonotski was also to act as intelligence officer to keep the crew members informed on matters regarding Poland.1

During the briefing at Celone on the afternoon of 14 August, the participating crew members in the second mission, were briefed by two officers of the Balkan Air Force. Lieutenant D.G. Wood indicated on a map the route they had to follow and then Captain J.E. Davies pointed out possible escape routes. Lieutenant-Colonel D.U. Nel, Officer Commanding 31 Squadron, and Colonel J.A. Williams, Officer Commanding 2 Wing, also attended the briefing. Wood and Davies briefly sketched the position of the resistance movement in Warsaw, as well as the critical situation experienced by the partisans. There were no facts available regarding the noticeable absence of Soviet assistance to the Polish partisans. Brigadier Durrant again emphasised the importance of the operation and stressed that, if flights were stopped, the partisans would be wiped out.2 He read from a telegram received from Bor-Komorowski that morning, expressing his gratitude. Durrant also announced Churchill had personally issued the order for the mission.3

Meanwhile, Liberators tasked for the mission were quickly prepared. Apart from repairing the engines, numerous bullet holes had to be sealed. Beginning from 19:30 the aircraft once again took off from Celone and Foggia on the

3 J.T. Durrant, Personal interview, Johannesburg, 14 June 1983.
second large-scale operation to Warsaw. Seven of the 21 Liberators participating in these flights were attached to 31 Squadron SAAF, and were mainly crewed by South Africans. Eight Liberators were attached to 178 Squadron, RAF. Six Halifax aircraft of 148 Squadron also participated. There were also several SAAF officers attached to 178 Squadron Royal Air Force.

For example, Lieutenant R.L. Lawson piloted one of the RAF bombers with Lieutenant A.D. D’Equille Scott as navigator. Both lost their lives when the plane was shot down north of Cracow.

The flights of the previous nights had alerted the Germans. Consequently it soon became clear that they were now ready for the heavily-laden aircraft and provided stiff opposition, especially to the north of Cracow. Using concentrated anti-aircraft fire, the Germans tried to prevent as many aircraft as possible from reaching Warsaw. Not only were many aircraft shot down in this process, but crew members were killed or wounded. Heavy bombardment was also encountered in Warsaw. Searchlights had been positioned all along the Vistula to facilitate the task of the anti-aircraft artillery. Flying over the raging fire in the city was like flying over a huge furnace. Some of the aircraft succeeded in reaching the supply zones and dropping their supplies. Others were caught in the beams of searchlights and heavily bombarded by anti-aircraft fire. Less fortunate aircraft crashed into the burning city. On the return flight, the barrages were heavier. More enemy fighters appeared and attacked what remained of the Liberators. Seven aircraft were lost during the operation. Although 15 aircraft reached Warsaw, only 12 succeeded in dropping their supplies on the planned air-supply zones.

Of the seven aircraft of 31 Squadron only four returned to their home base. This was a severe blow to the squadron. It also made the task of the remaining

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5 See chapter 10, Table 4.
8 See chapter 10, Table 4 and Table 5.
crew members more difficult. From then on, crews no longer could take turns to fly. All available aircraft had to make every trip.9

Notwithstanding the suggestions by General J. Eaker on 13 August to review the decision to employ heavy bombers to drop supplies to Warsaw,10 Lieutenant-General Carl Spaatz, Commander of the United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe, cabled the Military Mission of the United States of America in Moscow on 14 August, proposing the use of "Frantic 7" for dropping supplies to the Poles in Warsaw. He suggested a composition of approximately 70 bombers and 100 fighters. Fifty of the bombers would drop supplies and the remainder would bomb an airfield in the immediate vicinity of Warsaw.11 Carefully timed representations by the British Air Ministry to assist the Poles in Warsaw, amplified by the London Poles, who claimed the Warsaw Poles could only hold out for two or three more days, found the Americans responsive to the urgency of the humanitarian aspects of the situation.

Polish intelligence sources described anti-aircraft defences of Warsaw as virtually non-existent.12 This convinced Spaatz of the probable practicability of dropping arms and other relief supplies on designated areas in Warsaw. A message was immediately despatched to USAAF's Eastern Command, requesting Soviet clearance for a flight plan which called for dropping from minimum altitude and then immediately crossing over the Russian lines. The silence which greeted this humanitarian request was partly explained by a statement carried by Moscow papers the following day, bitterly denouncing Polish authorities in Warsaw who had encouraged and conducted the "premature and abortive uprising" there.13

While awaiting a decision from Moscow and after careful consideration of the proposed project, it was concluded the operation would amount to no more than a noble gesture. Realising a daylight drop would greatly boost the morale

10 Eaker's suggestions were discussed in chapter 4.
11 National Archives, Washington DC, Box 67, RG334: Cable UX 66380.
12 This hardly squares with the experience of SAAF and RAF crews.
of the beleaguered Poles and calculating that, with luck, 20 percent of the supplies might reach them, planning proceeded, pending a final decision.¹⁴

Continued efforts by 205 Group to aid Warsaw were carried out every night until 18 August, when the weather started to deteriorate. From that time, only a limited effort by 334 Wing was maintained until the night of 10-11 September.¹⁵

6.1.2 DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL FLIGHTS

6.1.2.1 31 SQUADRON SAAF

Liberator KG858 H, with Major S.S.Urry as pilot, departed from the airfield at Celone on its second flight to Warsaw. The previous night the aircraft had been forced to turn back as a result of technical problems and therefore had not been able to reach Warsaw.¹⁶ Initially the second flight went without a hitch. One light-aircraft battery and one searchlight were noticed in the vicinity of Cracow and two light anti-aircraft batteries were observed in the vicinity of Ochota. The crew reached the Vistula approximately 11 kilometres south of Warsaw, from where they could see red flashes and searchlights. From there the aircraft flew along the eastern bank towards the city. As a result of the smoke that enveloped the city, they could not positively identify any building. All 12 metal containers were dropped on the indicated zones. Two searchlights were observed to the east of zone A. Anti-aircraft fire was experienced over zones, A, B and C. Then the aircraft was hit by a shell which caused a 15 centimetres hole in the fuselage. Problems were also experienced with the radio, the steering gear and the intercom in the front turret. During their flight over the city, they saw several Liberators being shot down, one of which crashed to the west of the target area. During the return flight, air-to-air firing was noticed to the left of Cracow. An aircraft that had been hit, was seen to crash. Although KG858 H had been damaged by enemy fire, which caused many

¹⁶ D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, Union War History, Container 140, File 1, p.5570.
problems for the pilot and his crew, it managed to reach its home base at Celone safely.\textsuperscript{17}

The weather conditions during the flight of Liberator KG941 Q to Warsaw, with Captain L.C. Allen as pilot, were generally good. They flew at an altitude of approximately 3 700 metres from the Dalmatian coast. Two beacons were observed 95 kilometres south of Warsaw. One displayed the letters "ZI" and the other the letters "UT", which apparently were the relevant identification codes. Another beacon, displaying the letters "US", was noticed. The lights of a runway were observed, which were dimmed when they approached. Accurate anti-aircraft fire was observed in the vicinity of Cracow. The burning city of Warsaw could already be seen at a distance of 60-70 kilometres. The crew tuned the radio to a frequency of 224 kHz, which enabled them to head directly for the target area in Warsaw. The first bridge was approached from a northerly direction. A large burning building was observed as well as patterns of lights on the square and beacons around a tower.

At 01:30 all 12 metal containers were dropped and, according to calculations, 11 metal containers landed between north bridge and zone B. The parachute of one container was snagged and the container landed west of the city. Afterwards the letter "K" was signalled from the area. It was an indication that the supplies had been received by the partisans. Bluish-coloured searchlights were observed on both banks of the river, as well as a concentration of searchlights from Cytacela. Intensive light anti-aircraft fire was experienced from both banks and especially from the city centre. Flares were also fired from positions around the target area. The left wing of Liberator KG941 Q was damaged by anti-aircraft shells. Another Liberator trapped in the beams of a searchlight, which caught fire and crashed into the burning city was seen. Nevertheless the return flight went smoothly and without any incident.\textsuperscript{18}

Liberator KG875 D, commanded by Captain F.C. Serfontein, left Celone on its second flight to Warsaw. The previous night Serfontein had been forced to turn back at the Carpathian Mountains, as his navigator, Lieutenant R.J. Coleman, had lost direction as a result of bad weather conditions and dense clouds.

\textsuperscript{17} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54244.
\textsuperscript{18} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54245.
Serfontein was an experienced pilot with several thousand flying hours. When he and his crew reached the danger zone, the so-called flak alley, between the cities of Cracow and Tarnov, they were flying at an altitude of 2 400 metres. They could see grenade explosions and the flashes of flares everywhere. Blue and white beams from several searchlights illuminated the sky.

When reaching the Polish border, just after midnight, the crew noticed seven searchlights, as well as a number of small fires. A large fire was burning in the vicinity of Cracow. An enemy aircraft appeared but broke away without attacking. On their left they spotted a Liberator caught in the beams of a searchlight. A bright parabola of multicoloured tracers and flare bombs immediately lit the sky with streaks of fire coming from the guns of a night-fighter attacking the aircraft. The Liberator exploded and crashed. After a tension-filled flight over the remaining enemy areas, the Vistula was finally reached. The river was approached from the eastern bank. At the first bridge, they turned to port. The Vistula was covered with a blanket of smoke stretching from the side of the city for 16 kilometres onwards. Warsaw was covered in flames. The bright orange glow frightened but also fascinated the crew. Anti-aircraft shells and searchlights were seen everywhere. It was obvious that the Germans had been alerted and offered strong resistance. Bullets flew past between the left wing and the tail-section of the aircraft. At the same time, air grenades, filling the sky with warm metal, exploded around them. The Liberator started jolting violently and was so low above the ground, that the cracks of artillery shots could be heard above the noise of the aircraft's engines. Around them various buildings were burning and smoke from the burning ruins penetrated the aircraft, nearly suffocating the crew. The visibility was nearly zero.

19 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.95.
20 A military method utilizing the hours on the clock-face to indicate direction.
21 The aircrew realised that most probably fellow crew members, who left earlier from Italy on these flights, died in this explosion; L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.95.
24 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, pp.95-96.
John Coleman's account of the events reads as follows:

We rushed on through clouds of smoke. Our nostrils were filled with the smell of destruction. We were so low above the river banks that it seemed as if the wings of the aircraft could touch it. Ahead of us there were numerous searchlights, artillery fire and many fires. We approached the inferno fearlessly as we had reached the breaking-point of stress and a feeling of indifference took hold of us. We didn't care any more. Then we were above the city. Nearly every building was burning, as if I was flying over hell. On the banks, lights were flashing continuously.

Objects flew past us at an incredible rate. At this stage, I began anxiously to search for the first bridge. Seconds ticked by while the crew were counting the bridges across the Vistula. Upon reaching the first bridge, Serfontein ordered the second pilot to open the bomb doors. Lieutenant A. Oosthuizen opened the doors at the second bridge. It seemed as if the aircraft shuddered, hesitated and stumbled in its flight, as if invisible hands had grabbed it from behind. Reaching the fourth bridge, Serfontein changed course so that the target area was directly beneath us. After the turn to the right, I had to wait another two minutes. At that stage we were flying at a very low speed and my personal alertness was characterised by an unknown calm.25

The 12 metal containers were dropped one after another. The parachutes of 11 metal containers opened and landed safely. One became caught in the bomb doors, but later came loose and tumbled down. A Liberator nearby was hit by light anti-aircraft. One of its engines caught fire. The aircraft increased altitude but was caught by three searchlights and engaged by heavy anti-aircraft fire. To the horror of the crew of Liberator KG857 D, they saw the aircraft crashing south of the western bank. Another Liberator, hit by concentrated anti-aircraft fire, was seen crashing in a blaze.

To witness your fellow men being shot down, must have been very destructive on the morale of the aircrew. They were also subjected to exactly the same dangerous circumstances and must have realised that their aircraft could be hit next.

25 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.96; R.J. Coleman, Personal interview, Cape Town, 7 December 1984.
On the return flight, heavier barrages, air-to-air fire, followed by explosions on the ground, as well as flare bombs were encountered. After a tension-filled flight, the plane and its crew safely reached home base.  

In general, the flight of Liberator KG872 V, commanded by Captain W.E. Senn, went smoothly, although an enemy aircraft was spotted 15 minutes prior to reaching Warsaw, just after midnight. A bright orange glow illuminated the river-bank at the eastern side of the city. Firing was experienced mainly from the western bank of the Vistula, where intensive light anti-aircraft and cannon-firing came from two prominent positions. Searchlights were also noticed at several places on the river-bank.

The metal containers were dropped from an altitude of 90 metres and, according to calculations, the supplies landed between the defence positions on the western bank of the Vistula. At the same time, the Liberator was hit by artillery fire. Senn was seriously wounded in the thigh and the upper gunner was wounded in his hand. The rudder control cable of the Liberator was severed, the elevator control was partially cut and the hydraulic mechanism of the nose wheel was put out of action. Fuel started leaking, which increased the fire hazard. Instruments as well as the intercom system were put out of action. In the meantime, the gunner in the tail section of the aircraft continuously fired at the searchlights and shot out four. Senn then gave the preliminary order that the crew should prepare to jump. When he gave the order, it was not realised that he had been wounded and would crash with the aircraft, the buckle of his parachute having been shattered. Senn then determined that the automatic rudder control was still in proper working order and decided to risk the flight of 1450 kilometres to his home base with the aid of radio bearings. However, he had to make do without the aid of maps. A fire broke out in the navigational compartment shortly afterwards, but it was extinguished by the crew. One of the fuel tanks was shot to pieces, which forced them to fly more slowly than usual in order to save as much fuel as possible. The home flight, without maps and only the use of the automatic

26 Dooc S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54246.
27 The rudder control is the moveable steering lever of the aircraft. The elevator adjusts the longitudinal slope and lets the aircraft rise or fall.
rudder control, was extremely tense. They reached the Danube at daybreak. There was the danger of German fighters until they reached the landing strip at Foggia. Senn's crew was at no stage aware of the fact that he had been wounded.30

The remaining problem was to make a safe landing without manual rudder control or any indication of speed. The crew lowered the landing gear by hand and prepared to open parachutes from the side vents, to serve as an air-brake in case the brakes failed. Fortunately the brakes worked and they landed safely with the aircraft still on automatic rudder.31

There was scarcely enough fuel left for another 15 minutes of flight. At the camp, the doctor tended to Senn's wounds. He removed a piece of copper pipe and a few pieces of the zipper of his flying suit from the wound in his thigh. It was caused by anti-aircraft firing.32 During the flight, Senn was behind the controls of the Liberator for more than 11 hours. He flew 1450 kilometres in spite of being wounded and for this exceptional display of courage was immediately awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. Two other crew members, Lieutenant T.C.L. Symmes, the navigator, and Lieutenant T. Kipling, the radio operator, were mentioned in despatches.33

One of the most heroic trips of the mission was that of Liberator KG939 A, with Captain J.L. (Jack) van Eyssen at the controls. It left Foggia at 19:50 but did not return to home base.34 Since it became dark quite late, the flight commenced in broad daylight. Four of the crew members of this aircraft were members of the RAF. It was already dusk when they reached the Danube. Over the Carpathian Mountains they experienced very bad weather which, fortunately for the crew, later improved. They had to fly zig-zag all the time in order to avoid well-defended areas. At Cracow, also, there was a training centre for night fighters of the Luftwaffe.

30 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.105.

31 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54247.

32 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.105.

33 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa's First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.105.

34 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54248.
The Liberator's radio frequency was tuned to the broadcasts of Warsaw and they therefore flew directly to Warsaw with the aid of the radio compass. Approximately 24 kilometres south of the city, they identified the Vistula. Against the horizon a bright orange glow was visible. As they approached the city, they started to descend. The fire appeared to be raging right across the city, with thick smoke rising hundreds of metres into the sky.

Van Eyssen records that, upon reaching the target area, their altitude dropped from 1 830 metres to 60 metres. They circled widely and flew along the eastern bank, approaching the city from the north. He decreased speed to 250 kilometres per hour.

Approximately four kilometres east of the Vistula and approximately six kilometres south of Warsaw, beams from searchlights trapped the Liberator and it soon was engaged by six anti-aircraft guns. In an attempt to escape the anti-aircraft guns and get away from the frustrating searchlights, van Eyssen executed a swerve in flight. Sergeant G. Peaston then reported from the middle-upper turret that number three engine was on fire. Lieutenant R.G. Hamilton, the second pilot, immediately switched off the engine and activated the fire extinguisher. The propeller stopped, but the engine continued to burn. When Peaston reported that number four engine was also on fire, Hamilton followed the same procedure.35

The Liberator was then shaken by an explosion and oil started gushing out everywhere. The rear gunner, Sergeant L. Mays, and the beam-track gunner, Sergeant H. Hudson, were both hit by anti-aircraft fire and killed.36

Van Eyssen had difficulty in controlling the damaged aircraft because both engines on the right wing were out of action. Flames were fast spreading inside as well as outside the fuselage, illuminating the earth underneath. They were flying too low to abandon the aircraft and had no reserve power to increase altitude.

Peaston then reported that number two engine was also on fire. Instruments started to malfunction and the fire extinguisher failed. Explosions shook the Liberator with repeated hits from anti-aircraft fire. With the fuselage riddled,

36 J.L. van Eyssen, Personal interview, Johannesburg, 15 August 1983.
three engines burning and two gunners dead, the situation looked bleak and van Eyssen ordered jettisoning of all 12 metal containers.

However, van Eyssen ordered Hamilton to switch on number three and four engines. Number three immediately started with full power but number four would not. With two engines on full power, the Liberator rapidly succeeded in gaining altitude and moved away from the burning city. The crew members were ordered to parachute if necessary. At a height of approximately 350 metres the plane started on a south-easterly course. Severely damaged and with the right wing slowly breaking off, burning hydraulic oil spreading to the flight deck, van Eyssen ordered the crew to abandon the aircraft. After van Eyssen and the six remaining crew had jumped, the burning aircraft flipped upside down and crashed into the woods.

Van Eyssen landed safely and was brought to safety by sympathetic Poles. Peaston landed on the roof of a house where he was helped by Polish partisans. The next morning he was taken to a Russian front-line post where he met Lieutenant B.H. Austin. They found the navigator, Lieutenant D.R.F. Holliday, in a wooden cabin in the woods where he had been hidden by an old Polish lady.

The three survivors went to the burnt-out Liberator later that day, where they found the bodies of L. Mayes and H. Hudson. Polish partisans had, in the meantime, covered the bodies with red and white flowers. The body of Hamilton was found a little further away, where he had fallen, after his parachute failed to open.

Austin, Holliday and Peaston eventually joined the Russians, after being helped by sympathetic Poles. On 4 September 1944, they left Moscow to rejoin their

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38 J.L. van Eyssen, Personal interview, Johannesburg, 15 August 1983.
39 In a personal account to the author, van Eyssen commented as follows: The Russians displayed complete distrust and interrogated them at length on several occasions. The South Africans were even accused of deliberately dropping their supplies in German-controlled areas. The areas where their supplies had landed were indicated on a map. They were even threatened with being shot if found guilty of lying. Later, all were taken to a small village, Cosmos, and confined to a two-bedroomed house. During their stay at Cosmos they were also interrogated by a high-ranking Russian officer. On 30 August 1944, van Eyssen and his crew of four were first taken to Minsk and then to Moscow, where they had to stay for approximately two weeks to get their passports in order. During this time, van Eyssen was taken to the Kremlin for a so-called conference and bombarded with questions concerning the mine-laying operations of the Allies in the Danube. The Russians especially wanted to know how the mines were activated. Van Eyssen stressed he could not answer their questions, since it was a top-secret operation of which pilots, including himself, knew little. They had received no information regarding the operation of the mines. His ignorance infuriated the Russians.
squadron. They landed at Stalingrad for fuel, then flew on to Baku on the coast of the Caspian sea, where they spent the night. They left for Teheran early the next morning, 7 September, where they were handed over to the Royal Air Force.

Liberator KG871 F, with Captain N. van Rensburg commanding, took off on its second flight from Foggia to Warsaw.\(^{40}\) The previous night the crew had successfully dropped supplies in zone B. The second flight was, however, fatal and all the crew members were killed when their Liberator was hit by anti-aircraft fire from the burning city and crashed near Golidzinow.\(^{41}\)

The only information indicated in the sortie report, regarding Liberator KG836 C, was that it took off from Foggia and that this Liberator and its crew did not return to their home base.\(^{42}\) An eyewitness, a member of the Polish underground army, described what happened. He reported that they had heard the approaching aircraft over the city. The next moment artillery opened fire from all directions. The sky was filled with bright flashes and a tapestry of searchlights. Allied aircraft were above them dropping containers with supplies. One of the aircraft descended, and flew down Midowa street in the direction of the square. It seemed as if it completely disregarded the fury of the artillery. They watched the courageous actions of the pilot and his crew breathlessly and with admiration. As they reached the square, one of the wings struck a roof and seconds later the aircraft crashed into the street.\(^{43}\)

\(^{40}\) D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54249.

\(^{41}\) L. Isenonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.103.

\(^{42}\) D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, Union War History (Narep), p.5572; From an narrative compiled by the family of Lieutenant G.C Hooey, the following was revealed: Liberator KG836 was captained by Lieutenant G.C. Hooey, a pharmacist from Volksrust, Transvaal. He left for Europe to participate in the war as a pilot. The flight to Warsaw was fatal and he and his entire crew were killed when their aircraft crashed in Warsaw. These included Lieutenant Harry Male from Port Shepstone, who before the war was one of the youngest public prosecutors in South Africa, and Lieutenant T.D. O’Keefe, radio operator and gunner, who was also the owner of the squadron’s mascot dog, Sprog; L. Isenonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.102.

\(^{43}\) L. Isenonger, *Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron*, p.102.
The Poles immediately rushed forward to try and save the men, whom they regarded as heroes. One later died in their arms. The others were killed instantly. A guard of honour was formed and the men were buried in the street where their aircraft had crashed.44 Hundreds of Poles, among them priests, civilians and partisans, attended the funeral.45

The memory of this crew was honoured by the Polish government on the occasion of an impressive re-internment service in February 1947. Six coffins were put to rest in a snow-covered cemetery in Cracow. Each coffin was decorated with the Bronze Medal for Warsaw.46

6.1.2.2 178 SQUADRON RAF

On 14 August, eight Liberators of 178 Squadron RAF were detailed to drop containers of mixed supplies on Warsaw. These flights took place between 19:45 and 08:04 and supplies were dropped from an altitude of 120 to 210 metres. The return flights to Warsaw took between 10 hours and 12 hours.47 All the flights took off from Brindisi and landed at Amendola on their return. A discussion of the individual flights of 178 Squadron RAF tell an interesting story.

On their way to Warsaw, the crew of Liberator EW233 saw many searchlights as well as fighters, which were scattered from the Carpathians to Warsaw. Upon their arrival over Warsaw the crew took a bearing on the river, presumably south of Warsaw, but then lost the river and orbited for ten minutes without any success in identifying the target. Searchlights and anti-aircraft fire were observed. The aircraft returned safely and all the containers were brought back to base.48

44 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.102.
45 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.102.
46 L. Isemonger, Target Warsaw. The Story of South Africa’s First Heavy Bomber Squadron, p.102.
When Liberator KG942 reached Warsaw, the docks were identified and a bridge as well as a cross were seen. All the containers were dropped and were seen to fall in the centre of the target area.

Up to 20 searchlights as well as heavy and light anti-aircraft fire were seen from all directions. It was mainly concentrated at Powazki. Near Sluzen, an object, which appeared to be an aircraft on fire, was seen in the air. It fell to earth and exploded. Home base was reached safely.49

At Warsaw, Liberator KG933 crossed the bridges on the river Vistula, and positively identified the dropping area. The containers of mixed supplies were dropped on these zones and five containers were seen to hit the ground. The crew saw scattered light anti-aircraft fire along the river and three searchlights in Warsaw proper. Although the Liberator was followed by fighters for more than 20 minutes and was continuously caught in the beams of searchlights after leaving the target area, it landed safely at Amendola.50

On their way to Warsaw, the crew of Liberator KG938 noticed a junction with the Vistula coming in from the north and a road running parallel to the river. The aircraft turned into the junction, then turned around and flew for 22 minutes on this course. They saw two lakes directly underneath them and then passed a town about 12 kilometres to port. The crew then decided to turn back to the town. The Flight Engineer was first to observe a bridge when crossing the river. The containers were dropped on the correct area. It was the larger part of a built-up area to the west of the river. The crew members were nevertheless doubtful about their success in dropping the containers on the correct zones. On their way back to base, heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered. Two circling searchlights were seen as well as a massive fire of yellowish colour, burning in a rectangular shape. The aircraft reached Amendola safely.51

Upon arriving over Warsaw, the crew of Liberator EV839 identified the target area. Owing to heavy anti-aircraft fire, evasive action was taken and the containers were therefore dropped on the outskirts of Warsaw and not in the allotted area. Light anti-aircraft fire was also experienced from the Marymont

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area. Two unidentified aircraft were seen in the target area with navigation lights on. They appeared to be circling in the area of Warsaw. Home base was reached safely.\textsuperscript{52}

Three aircraft crashed. One of them was seen by the crew of Liberator KG942 when it fell to earth and exploded.\textsuperscript{53}

\section*{6.1.2.3 148 Squadron RAF}

Six Halifax aircraft of 148 Squadron RAF participated in the flights to Warsaw on 14-15 August 1944. Two aircraft returned early due to technical problems. Three aircraft reached the target area in Warsaw. One aircraft crashed. Altogether 26 containers and 12 packages were dropped over the target area. All the aircraft flew from Brindisi and returned to Amendola.\textsuperscript{54}

Owing to technical problems, excessive petrol consumption and its inability to increase height, Halifax EB179 Q had to turn back on the coast of Yugoslavia. It landed safely at Amendola.\textsuperscript{55}

Reaching Warsaw, Halifax HN897 T dropped eight containers and six packages over the target area from an altitude of 140 metres. They encountered light flak and machine gun fire over the target area and Sergeant R.L. Short received two bullet wounds in his arm as well as other abrasions. The crew witnessed an aircraft being shot down over the target area. The aircraft's intercom system was hit by flak and was put out of action. The aircraft was so seriously damaged that, when it got back home, it had to be handed over to 144 Military Unit for major repairs.\textsuperscript{56}

When Halifax JD319 G reached Warsaw, nine containers and six packages were dropped over the target area from an altitude of 200 metres. The aircraft was holed by flak, the engine cowling was pierced and almost a half metre of flap

\textsuperscript{52} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.10.

\textsuperscript{53} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.10.

\textsuperscript{54} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.3.

\textsuperscript{55} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.4.

\textsuperscript{56} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.6.
was shot away by anti-aircraft fire. The crew also saw an aircraft being shot down over the target area. They reached home base safely. 57

When Halifax JP254 D reached Warsaw, only the nine containers were dropped over the target area. Owing to the intercom and signal lights being put out of action by anti-aircraft fire, the dispatcher did not release the packages, and the pilot was not aware of this until the target had been left. An aircraft was seen shot down over the city. Although Halifax JP254 D had been damaged by flak, it succeeded in reaching Amendola. Halifax JN859 B left Brindisi but, due to technical problems, could not gain sufficient height to cross the mountains at Yugoslavia. It had to turn back. 58

6.2 THE WARSAW FLIGHTS OF 15-16 AUGUST 1944

6.2.1 DETAILS OF THE INDIVIDUAL FLIGHTS

6.2.1.1 178 SQUADRON RAF

Three Liberators from 178 Squadron RAF were detailed to drop containers of mixed supplies outside Warsaw on the night of 15-16 August 1944. 59

Upon their arrival at Warsaw the crew of Liberator KG838 saw a ground signal light flashing and all the containers were dropped. The parachutes were seen to open. 60 Light anti-aircraft fire was experienced near Sluzew. Fighter flares were seen in the area between Lodz and Radoli. Amendola was reached early the next morning. 61

Liberator EW233 left Brindisi at 19:45 but the captain, Flight Officer P.F. Raw, decided to return to base because blue flashes were coming from number three engine. All the containers were brought back to base. 62

59 See chapter 10, Table 7.
60 See chapter 10, Table 6.
Reaching Warsaw, the crew of Liberator KG933 noticed two lights flashing the letter "K". Eight white lights, lying in a straight line, indicated the flying path for the aircraft. Fighter flares were encountered to starboard. Another flare exploded about 1500 metres from them.

Over the target area machine-gun and rifle fire was encountered. All the containers were dropped.\textsuperscript{63} The crew saw the parachutes open and also saw a light being waved to and fro on the ground as the containers went down. \textit{En route}, in and out, many beacons were seen flashing the letters "K", "Z" and "N". Much light anti-aircraft fire as well as a tracer were noticed from east of the city, about 13 kilometres away. A white revolving beacon was seen about three kilometres north of the town. About three searchlights were operating in full swing. The Liberator returned safely to home base.\textsuperscript{64}

\textbf{6.2.1.2 \hspace{1cm} 148 SQUADRON RAF}

Three crews of 148 Squadron RAF took off from Brindisi on 15 August 1944 to drop supplies over Warsaw.\textsuperscript{65} Halifax JP295 P dropped 12 containers over the target area in Warsaw.\textsuperscript{66} It then returned to its base.\textsuperscript{67}

Due to technical problems on number three engine, Halifax JP254 D returned to base shortly after it took off.\textsuperscript{68} Four hours after Halifax JD319 G left Brindisi for Warsaw, problems were encountered when excessive petrol consumption was experienced and it was decided to return to base.\textsuperscript{69}

\textsuperscript{63} See chapter 10, Table 6.
\textsuperscript{64} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 1120, p.11.
\textsuperscript{65} See chapter 10, Table 7.
\textsuperscript{66} See chapter 10, Table 6.
\textsuperscript{67} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.4.
\textsuperscript{68} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.7.
\textsuperscript{69} Public Record Office, London, Air 27, Piece 996, p.8.