CHAPTER 8

THE FLIGHTS OF 10-11 SEPTEMBER 1944

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The reduction of effort from 18 August onwards caused grave concern to the Poles in Warsaw. On 3 September, there was only enough food and ammunition left for three more days. Bor-Komorowski urgently appealed to the Allies to mount a large-scale operation again but unfortunately it was not possible to agree to this urgent request, since bad weather prevented operations on any scale from 2-9 September. On the night of 10 September, weather improved and 20 aircraft once more set out for Warsaw to drop supplies.

Meanwhile, Major-General L.F. Anderson, Deputy Commander Operations United States Air Force (USAF), met with US Secretary of State, Harry Hopkins, in the White House on 7 September and expressed the fear that the US Government would seriously jeopardise its relationship with the Soviet Government by demanding the use of Russian airfields in Warsaw dropping operations; in fact, he was of the opinion the British had "used" the United States and damaged relations between Russians and the United States. According to his assessment, the entire situation had the makings of a major international incident with serious future implications for the United States.

On 10 September, the Soviet government unexpectedly informed Britain and the United States that they were prepared to participate in a joint project to drop weapons, food and medical supplies to assist insurgents in Warsaw. Thus the Russians had at last agreed to allow "Frantic" shuttle missions by the USAAF to Warsaw. The US Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, who wished

1 The Times, 4 September 1944: Warsaw patriots struggle, p4; The Observer, 3 September 1944: Was Warsaw's valour in vain?, p.4.
3 National Archives, Washington DC, Box 67, RG334: Memorandum, Conversation on Frantic Bases and Exploration, p.2.
4 National Archives, Washington DC, Box 67, RG334: Memorandum, Cable USSTAF 16572.
to take immediate advantage of the Russian agreement to co-operate, ordered Major-General R. Deane, head of the US Military Mission in Moscow, to draw up a plan in collaboration with the Russians immediately.\textsuperscript{5}

Barely two weeks after the Allied squadron had been withdrawn from the Warsaw operation, Air Marshall Sir John Slessor again gave orders that these squadrons had to prepare for further sorties to Warsaw. This time the crews were assured that the sorties would not be so dangerous. The parachutes that were attached to the containers and packages in the aircraft had been modified with the new type of delay fuse. This delaying mechanism would help prevent the parachutes from opening immediately the containers were dropped from the aircraft. A further advantage of this was that the containers could now be dropped from an altitude of 3 500 metres and still reach the supply strips undamaged.\textsuperscript{6}

Initially the adverse weather conditions prevented sorties from taking place. Consequently an extensive supply attempt to Warsaw could only be made on the night of 10-11 September. As was the case with the previous operations, the Polish liaison officer could not provide much information regarding conditions in and around Warsaw. It was reported, however, that the Soviet Union was no longer completely indifferent to the plight of the partisans. Epidemics, as well as food and ammunition shortages, made the task of the units in the city, who were still valiantly offering resistance, even more difficult. Because of this, they were compelled to evacuate the older parts in sector B of Warsaw. Because of the fact that it became impossible for the units of the Secret Army, who were hiding in the woods outside Warsaw, to reach the city, it became absolutely essential that Allied squadrons should once again take the responsibility of dropping supplies on the woods.\textsuperscript{7}

At a conference held at 205 Group Headquarters on 11 September, it was decided that the aircraft should follow a new route to Warsaw. Liberators would fly in a more easterly direction in order to avoid enemy-controlled and

\textsuperscript{5} N.D. Orpen, \textit{Airlift to Warsaw: The Rising of 1944}, p.155.


\textsuperscript{7} A.E. van Jaarsveldt, "Die Warskoudebakel", \textit{Militaria}, vol. 7, no. 4, 1977, p.34.
fighter-protected areas. The route would now extend mainly over safer Russian-controlled areas.8

31 Squadron and 34 Squadron SAAF as well as 148 Squadron RAF and Polish Special Duties Flight 1586 were accordingly tasked to deliver these supplies to the woods on 10-11 September.9 Each squadron had to provide at least four aircraft for these sorties, but due to technical problems, 34 Squadron only had three Liberators available.10

8.2 DETAILS OF INDIVIDUAL FLIGHTS

8.2.1 148 SQUADRON RAF AND POLISH SPECIAL DUTIES FLIGHT 1586

All four crews of 148 Squadron RAF who were detailed for operations over Warsaw on 10 September made use of the new delayed action dropping devices.11

Halifax JP245 P took off from Brindisi but due to technical problems and the compass of the aircraft being unserviceable shortly after take-off, the pilot decided to return to base. They landed after a flight of six hours. Two aircraft, Halifax JP246 B and Halifax JD319 G succeeded in dropping six containers on the target area outside Warsaw and returned after a flight of approximately ten hours. Halifax 88422 T, its pilot and five crew members did not return and the aircraft was presumed lost.12 Polish Special Duties Flight 1586 flew five sorties to Warsaw on the night of 10-11 September. Three of their aircraft were lost.13

10 See chapter 10, Table 14.
The South Africans once again took off from Celone for these long flights to Warsaw. With the approach of winter, rough weather and icy conditions experienced north of the Carpathian Mountains hampered the progress of the flights. Most aircraft flew nearly 11 hours to Warsaw and back. Above Warsaw, dense clouds concealed all the flare-strips that were supposed to identify the drop-zones. As a result, the Liberators were forced to descend lower than 3 400 metres in an attempt to identify the air-supply zones. Of the 16 aircraft participating in this flight, only seven, three from 31 Squadron, two from 34 Squadron and two from 148 Squadron, reached the target area to deliver their supplies successfully over the air-supply strips.14

Under these conditions, Liberator KG875 D of 31 Squadron had to maintain an altitude of approximately 4 000 metres. About two hours after take off, a convoy of vehicles was seen, moving northwards. They also saw three heavy anti-aircraft batteries at Kavaljevo and heavy and light anti-aircraft batteries at Lublin. When they reached Warsaw at midnight, demarcation lights were identified west of the city. To obtain distances of between four and 45 metres between containers, the 12 metal containers were dropped at intervals. Due to the bluish lights of nearly 40 searchlights, the position where the containers had landed could not be determined. About 20 heavy and 30 light anti-aircraft guns were operating at the target area. The bottom part of the aircraft’s upper turret was severely damaged and put out of action when light anti-aircraft fire from Warsaw hit the Liberator. On its return flight, six light anti-aircraft positions were observed in the vicinity of Dubrounir, Yugoslavia.15

Liberator KG874 J of 31 Squadron encountered heavy anti-aircraft fire in the vicinity of Rzezzow. Searchlights, an indicator path and a ground-to-air flare were also detected. They approached the city from a south-westerly direction. A dense bank of clouds obscured the whole area. Although they reduced their altitude to approximately 3 400 metres, they could still not identify the target area. They then increased their altitude to 4 500 metres. Eventually the city could be seen through an opening in the clouds. The ground demarcation

14 See chapter 10, Table 14.
15 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54353.
lights were now clearly visible as well as a block of burning buildings. The pilot, Captain K.G. Hayward, decided to use the burning buildings as a target.

Two practice runs were executed and then during the third run the supplies were dropped over the target area. Once again intervals were left between drops to obtain the required distances between the containers. They too, could not determine where the supplies had landed. They observed 16 heavy anti-aircraft batteries, intensive light anti-aircraft artillery and 16 searchlights with two controllers in the vicinity of the target area. Heavy artillery was identified to their right. On their way back, they saw a 16 kilometres long convoy of vehicles moving in a northerly direction, a reddish-white light which switched on and off and a huge fire on the coast.  

When Liberator KH104 F of 31 Squadron reached Warsaw, the pilot, Lieutenant C.F. le Sueur, tuned his radio into the Warsaw radio frequency. Because of extremely dense cloud formations and absolute zero visibility the supply strip could not be seen and le Sueur decided to turn back. The supplies were dropped over a partisan landing strip in Yugoslavia. On their way back, anti-aircraft flak and a huge fire were spotted.

Liberator KG886 A, of 31 squadron, captained by Lieutenant J.H. Smith, experienced the same poor weather conditions as the others. Three hours after take off, north of Rzezzow, an enemy aircraft suddenly appeared but later turned away and disappeared. Although light anti-aircraft fire was observed elsewhere, nothing was seen in the Rzezzow area. Just after midnight, the city and the Vistula river were identified. Although a diamond shaped ground marker was seen, the prescribed ground marker could not be located at all. All 12 metal containers were dropped over the presumed area. Air grenades, green and bright-red flares as well as light anti-aircraft flak, were detected at the target area, as well as searchlights in the northern and

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16 D OC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54354.
17 This was a system of radio transmission between the aircraft and a ground control unit in Warsaw. This radio frequency included a channel between certain specified wavelengths for the efficient transmission of radio electromagnetic signals.
18 D OC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54355.
southern parts of the city. During their return flight, a flare-strip and a beacon, displaying the letters "TV", were observed.\textsuperscript{19}

On its flight to Warsaw, Liberator EW195 A of 34 Squadron, commanded by Lieutenant J.A. Lithgow, also experienced rough weather conditions. From about 160 kilometres north of the Danube, right up to the target area, they encountered heavy anti-aircraft flak. At Warsaw, according to calculations, all 12 containers were dropped directly on target. It could not, however, be determined exactly how many parachutes had opened and how many supplies had landed in the right zones. Twelve searchlights and heavy as well as light anti-aircraft flak were observed in the vicinity of the target area. On the return flight, a flashing light, displaying the letters "TV", and three groups of German night fighter flare lights were observed.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{En route} to Warsaw, Liberator KG150 R of 34 Squadron experienced difficult weather conditions with heavy cloud density. On their way, light anti-aircraft flak was experienced at times but, north of Kavaljevo, intensive anti-aircraft fire was encountered. Over Warsaw, extremely dense cloud banks made it impossible for the crew to locate the target area but the 12 metal containers were, however, dropped at a position they estimated to be the correct drop-zone. Captain W.K.C. Carter, the pilot, then turned back and left the area immediately. On their way back a huge fire was observed in the middle of the Hafit Island. Another huge fire and a few smaller fires were seen on the southern bank of the Danube.\textsuperscript{21}

The sortie report of Liberator EW198 C of 34 Squadron with Captain E.A. Endler at the helm carries only the fatal information that its crew never returned home. This Liberator crashed during its flight to Warsaw. Although five of the crew members were killed, two members of the crew, Lieutenant J.W.P. Chapman and Flight Officer G. Crook, succeeded in bailing out and survived. They were later captured by the Germans.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54356.
\item \textsuperscript{20} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54832.
\item \textsuperscript{21} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54833.
\item \textsuperscript{22} D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 45, File 1, p.54834.
\end{itemize}
8.3 CONCLUSION

The squadrons dropped a total of 60 containers during these flights.23

The impracticability of the Warsaw flights was again underlined by the poor results of the sorties on 10-11 September. The deteriorating weather conditions would only handicap any further flights and prevent similar ventures.24 From 12 September, the South African squadrons were employed for operations against the airport of Athens and other operations.25

On 13 September, Allied Headquarters received the following telegram from the partisans in Warsaw:

Eleven containers found so far. Three drops on centre area of city and two on southern area. Essential that you should drop on centre area of town. Anti-aircraft defences weak. No aircraft shot down over city. Our losses are heavy. Increase your effort to maximum. Tonight we stand as last night.26

Bor-Komorowski reported the same day on the general situation in Warsaw.27 According to him the situation had remained basically unchanged since early August 1944, except for the loss of Stare Miasto (old town) and Powisle. The patriots held Sridmiescie (the centre of the city), the outlets from the city, as well as the southern part of Mokotow, and the northern part of Zoliborz. He also requested bombing of enemy airfields near Warsaw.28

On 16 September, 31 Squadron and 34 Squadron of 2 Wing SAAF was informed of the possibility of further sorties to Warsaw and they were told to be in a state of readiness. But adverse weather conditions would, repeatedly, prevent these flights.29

23 See chapter 10, Table 13.
24 Daily Telegraph, 13 September 1944: Poles thank Britain for supplies to Warsaw, p.6.
25 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.53996.
26 D DOC S, Pretoria, SAAF, War Diary, Container 44, File 1, p.54434.
28 National Archives, Washington DC, Box 22, RG334: Memorandum, Cable from General Bor, p.1.
29 J.T. Durrant, Personal interview, 14 June 1983.