

Fortress Pilot Of Centerville Meets Death

Shot Out of Air Over
Germany on Jan. 13;
Buried in the Reich

ONLY 20 YEARS OLD

First Lieut. Louis John Lawrence, Jr., 20-year-old Flying Fortress pilot from Centerville, is dead after having been shot down on a mission over Germany 18 days ago, his parents were informed yesterday afternoon by a War Department telegram.

Desperately wounded when his plane was blasted out of the air on Jan. 13, Lieut. Lawrence died later and was buried on German soil, the message said.

The aviator's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Lorence of Route 3, Centerville, sent the telegram to a daughter in Oil City last night and The Herald was unable to study it, but so quickly did the news come through that it is probable that the plane crashed behind our own lines. If it had fallen in German-held territory, the news would have had to travel through the International Red Cross offices at Geneva, Switzerland, taking much longer to reach the U. S.

Had Narrow Escape Previously

Before his last mission, Lieut. Lawrence had at least one very narrow escape. On Jan. 10 The Herald published a dispatch from an Eighth Air Force bomber station in England telling how the officer brought his Fortress, "Twan-m-g," 600 miles to its home base in England on only two engines after the craft had been riddled by more than 100 flak holes. The dispatch was dated Dec. 23.

At that time two other members of his crew were from Pennsylvania—the navigator from Marion and the bombardier from State College.

The last letter the Lorence family has so far received was written by the aviator on Jan. 3. He said he had 18 missions to his credit—the mission from which he returned on two engines was the 18th, according to the AAF dispatch—and had only seven more to go. He added that, if he was lucky, he would be home in March.

Became 20 Last Month

Lieut. Lawrence reached his 20th birthday last Dec. 1. A graduate of Colestock High school in 1942, he was a football and baseball player and a member of the Sportsman club. The 1942 Optimist contains this about him:



LIEUT. L. J. LAWRENCE, JR.

"'Lew' . . . dark hair and eyes . . . quiet and reserved yet friendly . . . already has his aviator's license . . . to soar in the clouds as an aviator."

Lieut. Lawrence enlisted as an air cadet on Nov. 12, 1942, and was called for training in February, 1943. He went to Miami Beach, Fla., then to Douglas, Ga., next to Bainbridge, Ga., and finally to Turner Field, Albany, Ga., where he received his wings and commission on Feb. 8, 1944. From there he was sent to Lockbourne Army Air base at Columbus, O., and Lincoln, Neb. Final training with his crew was received at Dyersburg, Tenn., and the hop overseas was made last August. On the 7th of that month he buzzed his Fortress low over Centerville on his way toward Europe.

In addition to his parents, he leaves two service brothers and two sisters:

Charles Lawrence, who received a certificate of honorable discharge last Dec. 13 after having served as a private for more than two years with the Army ground forces in the Aleutians;

William Lawrence in the Merchant Marine, now near New York but expecting to go to sea soon;

Mrs. Frank Zahniser of Oil City and Mrs. G. W. Pond of Myrtle Beach, S. C.

PROMOTED TO LIEUTENANTS

The promotion of Lt. Mary A. O'Connor, commanding officer of the Wac recruiting office, Erie, and Lt. Esther Potts, executive officer, to the rank of first lieutenant, is announced. The Erie office is in charge of Wac recruiting for the counties of Erie, Crawford, Venango, Warren, Forest, and Mercer, and both young women have made acquaintances here during the recruiting activities.

Citation for Posthumous DFC Reveals Heroism of Centerville Pilot on 2 Fortress Missions

Lt. Lawrence's Parents Receive Medal After Officers' Futile Trip

Posthumous awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters made to the late Louis J. Lawrence, Jr., were to have been presented in person to his parents by Army Air Forces officers, but when the time of presentation came the officers found themselves in the wrong Centerville, Pa. Upon learning of the mistake, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Lorence, of Route 3, Centerville, Crawford county, requested that the medals be mailed to them.

The citation accompanying the cross includes the story of how Lieut. Lawrence died in action on Jan. 13, 1945, on his 25th combat mission. It follows:

"For extraordinary achievement while serving as pilot of a B-17 airplane on bombing missions over Germany on 30 November, 1944, and 13 January, 1945. On these operations Lieut. Lawrence exhibited outstanding flying ability and an exemplary devotion to duty.

"On 30 November, 1944, the aircraft which he was piloting was damaged by an intense barrage of anti-aircraft fire immediately after bombs were released. The fuel lines of the number one engine were severed and Lieut. Lawrence was forced to feather the propeller. Bursts of flak punctured the gasoline tanks in the right wing and they pierced the number three engine oil cooler, resulting in the loss of oil pressure. Simultaneously a fire broke out in the left wing. Employing consummate skill Lieut. Lawrence dived the airplane and extinguished the fire in the wing. As a result of the battle damage sustained by the aircraft, Lieut. Lawrence was forced to withdraw from the formation and proceeded to England alone.

"The inspiring determination evinced by this officer resulted in the return of the aircraft from deep within heavily defended territory to home base.

"On 13 January, 1945, Lieut. Lawrence performed his duties with distinction. Approximately one minute before bombs away a shell penetrated the nose of the airplane, fatally wounding him. He motioned to the co-pilot to continue on to the target and then became unconscious. The courage, coolness and tenacity of pur-

pose displayed by Lieut. Lawrence on these occasions reflect the highest credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."

The Air Medal citation reads:

"For meritorious achievement while participating in sustained bomber combat operations over Germany and German occupied countries. The courage, coolness and skill displayed by Lieut. Lawrence upon these occasions reflect great credit upon himself and the Armed Forces of the United States."