

JANUARY 9, 1948

The flight of four P-51S was begun from Marietta Army Airbase, Marietta, Georgia. Each pilot started his engine about 1335 CST, and immediately switched his radio to B Baker channel. Capt. Mantell, who was to lead the flight, contacted the tower and obtained take-off instructions and the flight taxied out, led by Capt. Mantell, Lt. Hendricks his wingman, Lt. Clements #3 leading the second element with Lt. Hammond as the element wingman. The first two ships were off the ground at about 1335, followed by the second two a minute later. Following the join-up in regular four ship formation, the flight proceeded on course towards Louisville, climbing up to 5000' and leveling off at this altitude. Capt. Mantell signaled for a channel switch to #3 C Charlie channel.

The flight proceeded without incident until over the Dale Hollow Reservoir at which point Capt. Mantell signaled for intrail formation and proceeded to drop down and make two 360° orbits over the Reservoir and then climbed back up to 5000' and proceeded on course again. The flight again proceeded without further incident to a point about five miles North of Godman Field. Godman Field was slightly off course and the flight drifted off to the right making contact with the Ohio Riverfront just north of Godman Field. At this point 1455 Lt, Hendricks, #2 man, broke away from the formation and headed towards Standiford Field. Capt. Mantell immediately after this began a rather sharp spiraling climb to the right at rather high power settings, necessitating a power setting of 47" MP and 2700 RPM to maintain position in the formation with him. He continued spiraling at about 14000' where he broke off the spiral and headed on a south-westerly heading of approximately 220°, still climbing at the maximum rate of 180 IAS. At about 16000' I put on my oxygen mask and began taking oxygen because it became apparent that Capt. Mantell was heading for much higher altitudes even though it was known before hand that he did not have oxygen equipment and neither did the element wingman Lt. Hammond. The flight continued on this south-westerly course and at about 18000' I attempted to pull up fairly close to the flight leader and try to signal him with hand motions and try to contact him on B Baker channel asking where the flight was headed. Capt. Mantell had at no time signaled for a change over to B Baker channel which is always customary from the flight leader, either visual signal or on the radio.

In one of my transmissions I notified Capt. Mantell that we were considerably over our ETA for Standiford Field and suggested that he notify Godman Field to relay our position to Flight Service to which he replied 'Roger'. However, I failed to hear Capt. Mantell contact Godman Field on this. In the next few minutes I heard Capt. Mantell say "Look", there's a town down there with an airport beside it",

Incl: # 8

1235000

and from previous flying in this area I recognize it to be the town of Bowling Green with it's airport to the south east, and at this point. I noted that we were at 20000' and still climbing. I called Capt. Mantell and notified that this was Bowling Green and again asked him what we were looking for. He then replied "Look, there it is out there at 1200 o'clock," and I was able to discern a bright appearing object, very small, and so far away as to be unable to identify it as to size, shape, color, but it was definitely something which could be seen. It's position was slightly lower and to the left of the sun. This was at approximately 1515. I called Capt. Mantell and told him I could see the object but suggested that since we did not seem to be making a gain on the object, that it would be better if we leveled off and tried to pick up some speed and possibly get under the object. His transmissions were garbled but he mentioned something about going to 25000' for about 10 minutes and then if we were unable to make any further progress towards the object, we could drop down.

From the time that the high blower kicked in at about 18000' Capt. Mantell did not seem to decrease the throttle heading to correspond with this and began pulling away from us at `18000' on up even though I was using these maximum power settings. At about 22500', realizing that it was too high to maintain without oxygen, I broke off the flight out of formation and Capt. Mantell disappeared, still climbing almost directly into the sun. I called him and informed him that we were breaking off the flight and returning to Standiford Field, but he did not acknowledge. Through the later stages of this climb Lt. Hammond was signaling that he was having trouble because of his lack of oxygen and wished to go down to a lower altitude. From the time we broke off from the formation, we began a rather sharp discent back on course to Standiford Field, About 40°, and finally established contact with Godmaa tower giving them a position report and our destination and asking them if they would try to contact Capt. Mantell and inform him that we were returning, in as much as he failed to acknowledge our previous message.

The last contact by radio which we had with Capt. Mantell was when he said he could see the object at 1200 o'clock which was from 20000' and when last seen he seemed to have the airplane under perfect control and still climbing towards the object. I relayed my thoughts to Godman tower as to what we had seen and proceeded with Lt. Hammond on my wing to Standiford Field, landing without further incident at approximately 1540. As near as I can recall, the last time we saw Capt. Mantell was approximately 1520. At no time did I observe Capt. Mantell to be in trouble and not until the later stages of the flight, prior to our breaking off of formation, did I realize what the object of this high rate of climb and unusual heading away from our ultimate destination was. By the time that I switched to B Baker channel, after we started climbing, we were apparently out of range of the Godman tower. In conjunction with the last time when we left Capt. Mantell I would judge our position to be about 40 miles northwest of Bowling Green.

A CERTIFIED TRUE OPY

RICHARD L. TYLER  
Captain Ky ANG

/s/ Albert W. Clements,  
1st Lt. KY ANG

1235000

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January 9, 1948  
Standiford Field  
Louisville, Kentucky

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In one of my transmissions I notified Capt. Mantell that we were considerably over our ETA for Standiford Field and suggested that he notify Godman Field to relay our position to Flight Service, to which he replied "Roger". However, I failed to hear Capt. Mantell contact Godman Field on this. In the next few minutes I heard Capt. Mantell say "Look, there's a town down there with an airport beside it", and from previous flying in this area I recognized it to be the town of Bowling Green with it's airport to the south east, and at this point I noted that we were at 20,000' and still climbing. I called Capt. Mantell and notified that this was Bowling Green and again asked him what were looking for.

He then replied "Look, there it is out there at 1200 o'clock", and I was able to discern a bright appearing object, very small, and so faraway as to be unable to identify it as to size, shape, color, but it was definitely something which could be seen. It's position was slightly lower and to the left of the sun. This was at approximately 1515. I called Capt. Mantell and told him I could see the object but suggested that since we did not seem to be making a gain on the object, that it would be better if we leveled off and tried to pick up some speed and possibly get under the object. His transmissions were garbled but he mentioned something about going to 25,000 feet 10 minutes and then if we were unable to make any further progress towards the object, we could drop down.

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The last contact by radio which we had with Capt. Mantell was when he said he could see the object at 1200 o'clock which was from 20,000', and when last seen he seemed to have the airplane under perfect control and still climbing towards the object. I relayed my thoughts to Godman Tower as to what we had seen and proceeded with Lt. Hammond on my wing to Standiford Field, landing without further incident at approximately 1540. As near as I can recall, the last time we saw Capt. Mantell was approximately 1520. At no time did I observe Capt. Mantell to be in trouble and not until the later stages of the flight, prior to our breaking off of formation, did I realize what the object of this high rate of climb and unusual heading away from our ultimate destination was. By the time that I switched to B Baker channel, after we started climbing, we were apparently out of range of the Godman Tower. In conjunction with the last time when we left Capt. Mantell I would judge our position to be about 40 miles northwest of Bowling Green.

s/Albert W. Clements  
ALBERT W. CLEMENTS  
1st Lt AC Ky ANG

A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY:

s/Robert J. D. Johnson  
ROBERT J. D. JOHNSON  
Major, USAF