Mission No. 92 – 12th December 1944 – Darmstadt

The following account by Lt John E DeWitt was published in the 493rd BG Association magazine "Briefing Notes"

Take off at daybreak all routine – flying in 'B' group – when passing over the English Channel , an exhaust 'stack' on the left outboard engine 'blew'. Lt. John Dewitt – pilot- decided to return to base before the situation deteriorated. The damaged engine burst into flames as they approached the base – due to low cloud they were already below a safe height to bale out and still carrying a full load – there were no alternatives. They had to land before the engine fire spread. As they made the final turn " I saw the burning wing sag". At this moment Lt. David Moore in the control tower announced over the tannoy "to all personnel – take cover". Devils Own clipped the tops of the trees, the burning engine dropped out of the wing, straight ahead was a parked B17, the flight control black and white control caravan and a trailer full of ground crews. With considerable skill and landing on mud, with wheels up, the B17 hit the ground at 40mph. Four crew in the rear were ordered to jump from their escape hatch, the engineer, Navigator and Bombardier catapulted themselves out between the fuselage and the left inboard engine. The co-pilot went out of his window and I went after him off the right wing – running like hell. I was less than 500ft away when there was a terrific explosion. All the windows of the control tower were blown out, causing slight injuries and cuts. A section of the landing gear was blown over the control tower and was burning between two jeeps. The force of the explosion was so great, it lifted the metal doors off the nearby hangar.
To quote Lt. Dewitt's own account "The Good Lord was riding command pilot to-day".

The destruction of 'Devils Own' was complete – not a single life had been lost but parts of the aircraft still surface on the site of the wreck at Debach Airfield. More original photographs can be seen in the gallery.

Devil's Own

Devil's Own