

Perseverance

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Perseverance can be described as doing something that is difficult, but you continue because you want to achieve a goal.

In the end, you may still fail, but at least you tried.

One of my favourite stories of perseverance in the face of adversity is the story of the crew of the Lady Be Good.

Lady Be Good was an American B-24D Liberator bomber that disappeared on its first combat mission on April 4, 1943, during World War II.

Departing from its air base in Libya, the mission was to bomb the harbour in Naples, Italy.

The mission was a disaster when a sandstorm caused problems and several aircraft had to abort. Lady Be Good never found its target due to poor visibility.

Eventually, the crew turned the aircraft around and headed back to the airfield over the Mediterranean Sea. By this time it was dark. Lady Be Good never landed at the airbase.

It was surmised at the airfield, that the airplane had crashed into the Mediterranean, and the crew of nine were all lost.

In 1958, a British oil exploration team were flying over the Sahara Desert when they spotted an aircraft on the ground and took note.

In 1959, another crew again saw the aircraft noted the exact location and made a report. A recovery team made a trip to the site to investigate. It was Lady Be Good.

Lady Be Good was in remarkable condition. Its radio still worked, and its guns still fired, but there was no sign of the crew.

An investigation, aided by a diary kept by one of the crew, revealed the mystery behind the disappearance of Lady Be Good.

The aircraft had technical issues and navigational errors while returning to the airfield in total darkness. The airfield fired flares to alert the aircrew of the location, but they didn't see them and the Lady Be Good over-shot their target and were now heading out over the desert.

In the dark, the crew thought they were still over the Mediterranean.

The commanding officer pilot warned the crew they were dangerously low on fuel and would have to abandon ship.

The entire crew baled from the doomed craft and expected to land in water. Instead, they landed on desert sand.

One of the crew died when his parachute failed to open.

The remaining eight crew members, managed to find each other using pistol shots and flares. They were eight men, lost in the middle of the Sahara with one-half of a canteen of water, and no food.

They reasoned their only hope, would be to walk north, in the direction of the airfield. They had no idea, that they had landed 400 miles inland. Their chance of survival at this point, without a miracle, was zero.

Ironically, if they had walked south, they would have come across their aircraft which landed on its own, almost intact, just 16 miles away. The aircraft had water, rations, and a working radio they could have used to call for help.

The group managed to walk 25 miles in the scorching heat. At that point, five of the men were too weak to continue. They had survived for eight days in the desert.

They were found in a group by a search party in 1960 ? 17 years after the failed mission.

One of the airmen had kept a diary and wrote down what they were experiencing. The diary entry said they were suffering so much in the heat without water, they were praying to die just to get it over with.

However, three of the crew persevered and continued walking.

Searchers expanded their recovery and located another body around 24 miles farther north. They found a seventh body a further 26 miles away.

It was later discovered that a British patrol came across a mummified body in 1953, around 75 miles from the site where the group landed. At the time, there were no reports of any Allied aircrew missing, and they assumed it was a lost Bedouin shepherd.

They buried the body and made a note.

It was later surmised, that this body was actually that of the last remaining airman who had managed to walk 75 miles in sand, in the scorching heat, with no water or food.

Now that is perseverance. He probably realized there was no one searching for them, and the situation was bleak, but he didn't give up.

Most of us will never face such a bleak situation, but perseverance to achieve a goal is always an admirable quality, even if you don't succeed.