

Historic Headlines (August 1945) Bomb Disposal Captain Barley Escapes Death

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The following story was extracted from a newspaper article posted in The Burlington NC Daily Times-News dated Monday 27 August 1945. It's just one example of why bomb disposal technicians are considered true heroes and sometimes extremely lucky.

"Dealing with unexploded bombs, the most hazardous job behind the front lines was handled jointly by British and American bomb disposal crews. Strictly speaking, the RAF [Royal Air Force] personnel removed duds and time bombs striking British fields and installations, and the AAF [American Air Forces] handles those landing on U.S. Army sites. But owing to the density of U.S. installations in the war-torn England, American and RAF bomb disposal crew usually worked together.

Both American and British bomb disposal crews have had some narrow escapes, but the story of the most exciting experience comes from a British Captain a RAF Corporal.

In the early days of bombs disposal, the main procedure for getting rid of unexploded bombs was to grab them up as quickly as possible, load them into trucks and cart them to open fields.

One night a 2,200 Herman [bomb] (named for Herman Goering because of its girth) landed in a British factory district. Shortly afterwards a British Captain and his bomb disposal crew arrived. As the bomb had a clockwork fuze that was ticking continuously, the officer had it loaded on a small lorry and took the steering wheel himself. He allowed only one man to start out with him to the bomb "cemetery".

On the way through one of the black-outed streets of a small village, the lorry crashed into a building and was wrecked. The 2,200 lb bomb, still ticking, broke through the front cab and nuzzled the Captain's legs.

At a glance at the nearby frame houses showed the Captain that this was no place for the bomb to go off. He commandeered a large truck with a hoist and loaded the wrecked lorry, bomb and all, on it. Since the bomb "cemetery" was at the bottom of a steep hill, bomb disposal crews usually stopped their trucks at the top the top of the hill and walked down to open the gate. On this night, the officer sat in the truck while the Corporal went to unlock the gate. Unfortunately, it had been wired shut with a piece of tangled cable and the Corporal was having difficulty opening it. The bomb was still ticking merrily away, and the Captain grew impatient. He decided to help the Corporal and climbed down from the truck then ran down the hill.

Just as he reached the gate, the bomb exploded. The men were in a hollow, the bomb blast went over their heads and their only injury was temporary deafness. All that was left of the truck was two wheels. The Captain said he never noticed if whether they were front or rear wheels."

A copy of this interesting article was found at the National Archives and is available for viewing by selecting the download link below.