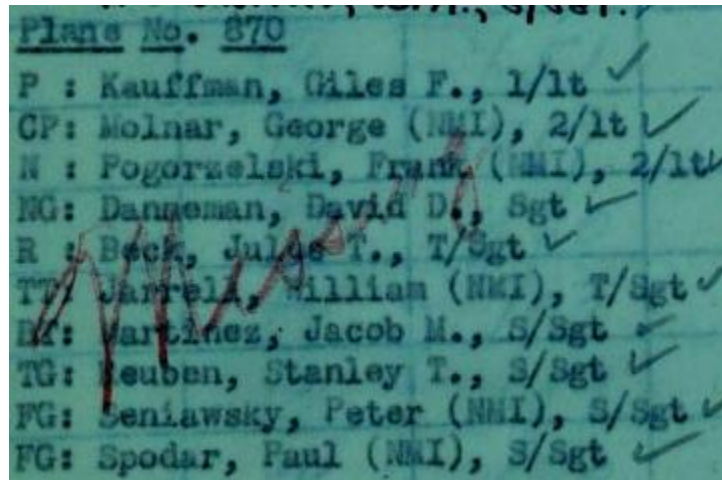


Peter Seniawsky's Black Thursday Escape

Staff Sergeant Peter Seniawsky was the Left Waist Gunner on the Giles Kauffman Crew, which was assigned to the 547th Bomb Squadron. On 14 October 1943, this crew was assigned to aircraft 42-29870, a 545th Bomb Squadron ship.



About one-half hour after attacking the ball-bearing factories at Schweinfurt, with the aircraft rapidly losing altitude, the bailout order was given. The entire crew bailed out successfully, and all became Prisoners of War – except Seniawsky. This is his story, in his words.

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For more about Seniawsky, read the chapter titled “Escape from Black Thursday” in Travis L. Ayres book “The Bomber Boys (True Stories of B-17 Airmen.”

Note: after the war, Seniawsky legally changed his surname to Scott.

STATEMENT BY T/SGT. PETER (NMI) SENIAWSKY, 12060630, LEFT WAIST GUNNER, A/C 870
MISSION TO SCHWEINFURT, GERMANY, 14 OCTOBER, 1943.

As soon as we reached the coast of France we were attacked by fighters and our No. 1 engine was hit. However, we continued on to the target, went over it with three engines and dropped our bombs. After we left the target, actually about 1/2 hour after we had passed over it, and being constantly attacked by fighters, we began losing altitude rapidly. The pilot then gave us instructions to bail out. I was the second many of crew to bail out, the ball turret operator being the first man out.

I blacked out from lack of oxygen and recovered at about 4,000 feet. I then saw three other chutes besides my own. I hit the ground, picked up my parachute and started running. I ran about 25 feet and found a little ditch about 3' x 3' and sat down to take off my flying shoes and put on my G. I. shoes which I had with me. About that time I heard some talking and upon looking I saw some civilians out in the field with shotguns. I lay down in the ditch and remained there for about three hours. At sundown I started crawling away. German soldiers came out of the woods and fired machine guns into the field, apparently trying to scare me out. I kept crawling on my hands and knees and they kept searching for me. I crawled into some grass about 3-1/2 feet high and stayed there for a while trying to decide whether to keep going or to give myself up. I finally decided to continue. I kept crawling until I could not hear any more conversation by the German soldiers. I came to a road and was about to climb over a barbed wire fence when a German soldier passed by. I lay down and he passed within about five (5) feet of me.

I had a heading on my compass of southwest. I walked all the night until sun-up the next morning, when I hid myself in a haystack. I tried to keep warm but could not because I was wet. I ate the tablets from my escape kit and remained in the haystack all day and continued on that night.

That night I walked down the road southwest, avoiding all vehicles.

In the morning I covered myself up with leaves and twigs in a field and slept there all that day. I continued on that night, after eating something more from my escape kit. I had had no water since I had biled out with the exception of some moisture from leaves. I went down to a pump on the outskirts of a town nearby and filled my water bottle. While I was filling my bottle a dog commenced barking and I ran until I came to a barn outside of the town. I climbed into the barn and went to sleep. Early in the morning a man came out to repair the roof and I decided to leave. I climbed down and found a little piece of apple peel on the ground and ate that. I ran across a field and laid up in a little patch of woods near the field. That afternoon I heard a lot of talking. I looked out and saw two men standing outside and pointing toward me. I thought I was caught and came out with my hands up. I tried to make them understand that I was an American airmen and asked them where I was. They had a hard time understanding me, but they finally told me that I was about 5 kilometres east of Metz after three nights of walking. I asked them for help. They said they would help me, went away and came back and gave me some sugar and pears. They left me that night, after telling me the Germans were looking for me.

I walked down the tracks of a railroad in the vicinity all that night. I decided to find some shelter because it had begun to rain. The only thing I could find was an oak tree, so I lay down under that. The tree did not provide very much shelter, so I crawled into a little drain under the tracks, which was about 3' x 3'. I stayed there all day and that night continued on down the tracks. I became so thirsty that I decided to pump some water from a house beside the tracks. As I finished pumping the water a woman came out and I asked her in French if she spoke any French. She replied that she did. I looked at her clothes and I noticed that she had an overseas cap on which had a swastika on it. I then asked her if she spoke German. She said that she did,

so I said "Auf Wiedersehen" and left.

I walked up the road and turned again to the railroad tracks. I continued walking for a few hours and I found a shelter which I believe had at one time been a bomb shelter and stayed there for the night. At nine o'clock in the morning I looked down the tracks and saw a peasant crossing them. I decided to try to get some help from her, because my morale was getting very low at this time. I approached her and asked her "Parlez vous Francais". She replied that she did not speak French but that she spoke Polish. I could speak a little Polish, so I told her I was an American airman and wanted help. She said that she could not help me herself, but would try to get some help for me. I went back to my hiding spot and about a half hour later she came back with a man. She introduced us and I told him my story and after about an hour I was able to convince him that I was an American airman. He said that he would take me across the frontier if I would wait there three (3) days. I agreed and he left me after giving me food. That night he returned and told me that he could not take me across the frontier because the Germans were out looking for me. He then left me. As soon as he left me I hid in the shadows in the bomb shelter and a young child about 11 or 12 years old looked in and I heard someone say something to him. Whoever it was left, and after waiting an hour or so I left and continued walking.

I walked all that night and about sun-up I spotted another hiding spot, a barn, and climbed up into it. I crawled into the hay, pulling it all around me, and fell asleep. At sundown I took off again and walked along the road. I took a wrong road at this time and had to cut across a field to get back on the right road again. Shortly afterward I found a hiding spot in a haystack, crawled into it and went to sleep. Just about the time I was dropping off to sleep I heard a lot of talking outside and upon looking out I saw a German patrol. I covered myself up well with hay and I heard the Germans walking to-

wards me. Two Germans came up to the haystack, looked around, did not see me, and left. The next morning there were two German soldiers and a police dog walking up and down in that neighborhood. I did not see them in the evening, so I started walking southwest, walking all of that night. It began to rain, and I found a little shack inside a town and I hid out in the shack. However, the rain came right through it and I decided to leave and find a better hiding spot. Just as I came out a peasant was coming out of a farmhouse across the road. I approached him and asked him if he spoke French. He said no, but that he spoke Polish. I told him that I was of Polish descent and an American airman and wanted help. He said that he could not help me because German soldiers were sleeping in the next house. I finally persuaded him to let me sleep in his barn. He came up the next afternoon and gave me a sandwich and some apples and I asked him where I was. He told me I was about 3 or 4 kilometres from the frontier. I asked him to take me across the frontier, but he said that he was afraid because of his family. I then asked him to give me a diagram of the frontier, which he did.

That night about sundown I left my hiding spot, but decided to wait until about 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning before attempting to cross the frontier, because I felt that the soldiers would want to find a warm spot about that time. I crossed the frontier on my hands and knees, crawling under two barbed wire fences about 150 yards apart.

I was then in France, so far as I knew. I walked all that night and in the morning hid up in a haystack outside of a town. This was eight (8) days subsequent to my bailing out. I decided to pull out and look for the underground. I walked down the road in the daytime, approached a peasant and told him I was an American airman and wanted help. He asked me into his house and gave me some food, permitted me to shave and he gave me a pair of pants and a coat. He could not give me a shirt, so I ripped the lining from the coat and made a scarf of it, in order to cover up my O. D. shirt.

Then I left him and continued on my way. That afternoon I saw a Frenchman in the road and I teamed up with him. That afternoon I also found out that he spoke French and I spoke Polish, and we could not understand each other's language, so we used the sign language. At the outskirts of one town he asked a truck driver for a lift and while he was talking to the driver I got into the truck. In the town the Frenchman left me and I walked along the street, hoping to get help. The town was full of German soldiers. I heard a man talking to his child in Polish and I took a chance and asked him if there was a place we could talk privately. He said there was and he took me into a cafe. He did not believe me at first and he was afraid to take a chance, but he took me to another place and began passing me from one man to another. I finally told him that what I wanted was a place to sleep. He said that I could sleep in his house until the early morning and he took me to his home and I found a place to sleep there. About 4 o'clock in the morning he came and woke me up and told me that I had to leave.

I left him, and since it was Sunday, I went to church and remained there from 6 o'clock in the morning until 10 o'clock in the afternoon. In the afternoon I went to a theater and after that I went to a cafe. I ordered a glass of beer, drank it and ordered a second glass. There was a German soldier standing beside me and I did not feel like taking out a 100-franc note because peasants do not have 100-franc notes, but I could not find any small change. After looking through all my pockets without finding any change, the German soldier looked at me and paid for my glass of beer. I thanked him in French and then went to another cafe, and remained there for about three (3) hours looking for help. I became disgusted and went down to the railroad station and watched the people buying tickets, and I noticed that the poorer classes of people bought their tickets at one particular window. I went to the window

and bought a third-class ticket to where I wanted to go. I had about a five-hour wait before the train came, so I spent that night in a third-class waiting room.

I got on the train early in the morning, and when I got to unoccupied France the train pulled into a station and stopped. I ran from the train and bought a ticket to another town and as the train was pulling out I jumped aboard. I fell asleep on the train and woke up in Marseilles.

In Marseilles the gendarmes were checking all papers. Since I had no papers I did not know what to do. I noticed, however, that some workmen were walking out through a rear exit. I got right into the center of them and went with them out past the German guard. I walked with them for two or three blocks and came back and got on the train again. I bought a ticket to my destination and boarded the train. On the way to the frontier I took the wrong train which I discovered when the conductor asked me for my ticket. He started "squawking" and I got off at the next station and took another train. Again on this train I discovered that I had gotten on the wrong one. I took out a 50-franc note to buy a ticket to the frontier. Before I could get one some German soldiers came through the train checking papers. I decided to jump off the train, and I hung on to the outside of the train, standing on these steps. I was there about a half hour, when I figured the German soldiers must have left the car. I climbed back in again and finally reached the frontier.

I started walking across the Pyrenees. I walked all that day, and on the 15th day after bailing out I was up to the last range of the Pyrenees. I was practically exhausted and about to collapse from lack of food and water. I climbed the last mountain on my hands and knees.

I finally saw a town in Spain and got down off the Pyrenees and walked along a road when I was stopped by a Spanish frontier guard. He asked me for my papers, and of course I did not have any. I was taken to a Spanish prison where

I was photographed and fingerprinted and had all of the hair shaved off my head. I was in this prison for a week, but was finally taken out by the American consul. I was interned for three weeks thereafter and then was sent on my way to the United Kingdom.