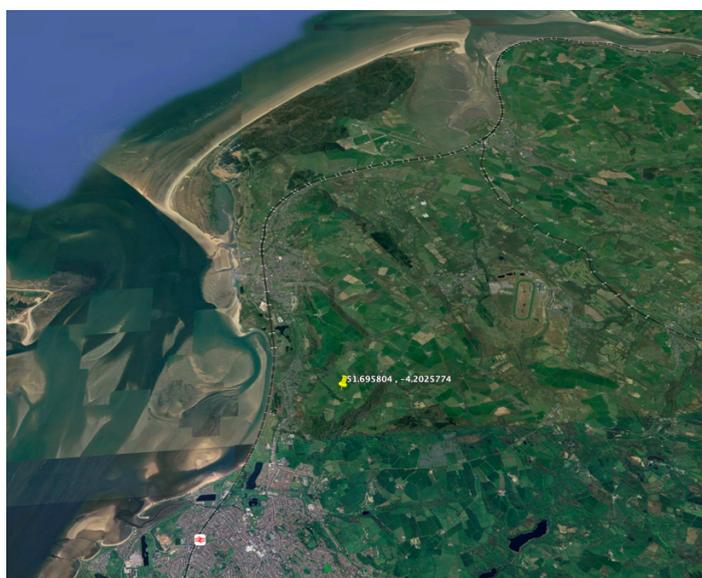


## **Penrhyn Farm Martin B-26 Marauder Plane Crash 1943**

The aircraft named MI LAINE was caught in thick fog on 4 June 1943 and was descending to find a place to land. It flew into a hay barn at Penrhyn Farm at Pwll, near Llanelli, and exploded. The report compiled on the incident noted that the B-26 was on a squadron transfer flight from Port Lyautey, Morocco, to St Eval when it crashed three miles southeast of RAF Pembrey at 16:15 hours. The plane was assigned to VIII AFBC, 322nd Bomb Group, 449th Bomb Squadron.



The weather ceiling and visibility were both zero, with a solid overcast and light rain. Investigators summarized the cause of the loss as an instrument let-down over hills with clouds in unfamiliar territory, with no radio or blind approach facilities available. The aircraft was flying level at quite a high speed when it hit a tree with its left engine, then struck a hayrick with its right engine, glanced off a bank, shed the left outboard wing panel and the left horizontal stabilizer, and dropped over a second bank on the other side of the field, dropping the left engine near the bank. It then crashed in the centre of the field, bursting into flames. The path of the main parts of the plane could be clearly followed. None of the control pedestal could be found to allow a check of the control positions.



The recommendations from the investigation included the following:

1. Flight approval should be given by Combined Control at Gloucester.
2. All aircraft should be provided with maps of the UK and Ireland with all airfields and landing strips marked on them.
3. Flights should only take off in very good weather if they are relying on the lead aircraft with the only radio operators and navigators on board.

Three of the aircrew were identified from their identity disks, and the fourth was identified from papers he was carrying.

The crew members who perished were:

- **Lt John Reiss**, Pilot
- **Lt Eugene Carby**, Navigator
- **Sgt Raymond Shoemaker**, Engineer
- **Lt William Shoop**, Passenger

### **Lieutenant John Reiss, Pilot**

**Name:** Lieutenant John Reiss

**Hometown:** Corpus Christi, Nueces County, Texas

**Date of Birth:** 1920

**Date of Enlistment:** January 19, 1942

**Place of Enlistment:** Houston, Texas

**Service Branch:** U.S. Army Air Forces

**Service Number:** O-664658

**Unit:** 449th Bomber Squadron, 322nd Bomber Group, Medium

**Aircraft:** Martin B-26 Marauder, named "Mi Laine"

**Last Mission:** June 4, 1943, Penrhyn Farm, Pwll, Wales

Lieutenant John Reiss was born in 1920 in Corpus Christi, Nueces County, Texas. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Forces on January 19, 1942, in Houston, Texas, demonstrating a commitment to serve his country during a time of global conflict.

As a member of the 449th Bomber Squadron, 322nd Bomber Group, Medium, Lieutenant Reiss served as a crew member on the Martin B-26 Marauder medium bomber, an aircraft known for its speed and heavy armament. His plane, named "Mi Laine," was part of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, which played a crucial role in the Allied bombing campaigns over Europe during World War II.

On June 4, 1943, during a transfer flight from Port Lyautey, Morocco, to St Eval, the B-26 Marauder encountered severe weather conditions and thick fog. While attempting to find a place to land, the aircraft tragically crash-landed at Penrhyn

Farm, Pwll, near Llanelli, Wales. The crash resulted in the loss of all crew members on board, including Lieutenant John Reiss.

Lieutenant Reiss's service and sacrifice are remembered as a part of the broader efforts of the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II. His bravery and dedication to duty exemplify the courage of those who served in the most challenging circumstances.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56293661/john-w-reiss>

### **Lieutenant Eugene Manning Carby, Navigator**

**Name:** Lieutenant Eugene Manning Carby

**Role:** Navigator

**Date of Birth:** 1922

**Service Branch:** U.S. Army Air Forces

**Unit:** 449th Bomber Squadron, 322nd Bomber Group, 9th Air Force

**Aircraft:** Martin B-26 Marauder, named "Mi Laine"

**Last Mission:** June 4, 1943, near RAF Pembrey, Wales

Lieutenant Eugene Manning Carby was born in 1922 and served as a navigator on the Martin B-26 Marauder medium bombers with the 449th Bomber Squadron, 322nd Bomber Group, 9th Air Force. The B-26 Marauder, known for its speed and heavy armament, played a significant role in the U.S. Eighth Air Force's bombing campaigns over Europe during World War II.

On June 4, 1943, during a squadron transfer flight from Port Lyautey, Morocco, to St Eval, the B-26 Marauder, carrying Lieutenant Carby, encountered severe weather conditions and thick fog. The aircraft, named "Mi Laine," was navigating through these challenging conditions when it tragically crashed three miles southeast of RAF Pembrey, near Penrhyn Farm, Pwll, Wales. The crash resulted in the loss of all crew members on board.

Lieutenant Carby's service and sacrifice are honoured as part of the collective efforts of the U.S. Army Air Forces during the war. His role as a navigator was crucial in ensuring the success of numerous missions, and his bravery in the face of adversity exemplifies the courage and dedication of those who served during World War II.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/202854355/eugene-manning-carby>

### **Technical Sergeant Raymond John Shoemaker**

**Name:** Technical Sergeant Raymond John Shoemaker

**Date of Birth:** August 17, 1913

**Place of Birth:** Mertztown, Berks County, Pennsylvania, USA

**Service Branch:** U.S. Army Air Forces

**Unit:** 449th Bomb Squadron, 322nd Bombardment Group

**Aircraft:** Martin B-26 Marauder, named "Mi Laine"

**Date of Death:** June 4, 1943 (aged 29)

**Place of Death:** Wales

Technical Sergeant Raymond John Shoemaker was born on August 17, 1913, in Mertztown, Berks County, Pennsylvania. He served with the 449th Bomb Squadron, 322nd Bombardment Group, of the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II.

On June 4, 1943, Sergeant Shoemaker was a crew member on a Martin B-26 Marauder medium bomber, named "Mi Laine," which was on a squadron transfer flight from Port Lyautey, Morocco, to St Eval. The aircraft, part of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, encountered severe weather conditions and thick fog. While attempting to find a place to land, the B-26 tragically crashed three miles southeast of RAF Pembrey, near Penrhyn Farm, Pwll, Wales. The crash resulted in the loss of all crew members on board, including Sergeant Shoemaker.

Sergeant Shoemaker's dedication and service are remembered as part of the broader efforts of the U.S. Army Air Forces during the war. His role and sacrifice, along with his fellow crew members, are honoured for their contributions to the Allied war effort and their bravery in the face of adversity.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/40704568/raymond-john-shoemaker>

This tragic event highlights the significant dangers faced by WWII aircrews, especially under adverse weather conditions and with limited navigation aids. The sacrifices made by these servicemen are a poignant reminder of the perils of wartime aviation.

### **Martin B-26 Marauder**

In 1939, the Martin B-26 Marauder was built in parallel with the North American B-25 Mitchell. However, while the B-25 was known for its docile handling, the B-26 was quite the opposite. Built for speed, the B-26 was a highly strung and unforgiving airplane that required the most experienced pilots to handle it effectively. It had the highest wing loading of any American World War II airplane at 56 lbs/ft<sup>2</sup>—40% higher than that of the B-25. While such wing loading is now standard in the industry, World War II aircraft lacked the sophisticated automatic braking and propeller feathering systems available today, increasing the likelihood of accidents.

The B-26 was rushed into service, overloaded with equipment without a corresponding increase in power, and assigned to low-level ground attack missions

for which it was not designed. It experienced engine and propeller failures beyond Martin's control, contributing to its poor reputation. Its overloaded wing made it susceptible to flak and limited its ability to sustain battle damage. The aircraft suffered badly on low-level missions, but its performance improved significantly when used as a medium-level bomber, the role it was originally designed for. After initial mechanical issues were resolved and pilots received better training, its loss rate diminished to levels comparable to other aircraft in service.

Engineer Peyton M. Magruder of the Glenn L. Martin Company designed the B-26 with a near-perfect streamlined fuselage, except for the stepped windshield. It had a shorter wing to achieve a higher maximum speed, but this came with trade-offs. The landing approach speed was much higher than most pilots were accustomed to, and the short wing reduced its durability in combat.

For unwary pilots, the B-26 could be a death-trap. Hastily entered service to meet wartime demands, it was often flown by inexperienced pilots. It earned nicknames such as the Widow Maker, the Baltimore Whore, the Flying Prostitute (because it had no visible means of support), and One a Day in Tampa Bay, the latter after 15 crashes in a single 30-day period. With a landing speed of 140 mph (225 km/h), it was too much airplane for novices to handle.

## **Manufacturing and Specifications of the Martin B-26 Marauder "Mi Laine"**

### **Manufacturing:**

The Martin B-26 Marauder, including the "Mi Laine," was manufactured by the Glenn L. Martin Company. The production of the B-26 Marauder began in 1941 at the Martin plant located in Middle River, Maryland. The aircraft was designed by engineer Peyton M. Magruder and was intended to be a high-speed medium bomber.

### **Specifications:**

#### **General Characteristics:**

- **Crew:** 7 (Pilot, Co-Pilot, Navigator/Bombardier, Radio Operator, and 3 Gunners)
- **Length:** 56 ft 1 in (17.12 m)
- **Wingspan:** 71 ft 0 in (21.64 m)
- **Height:** 21 ft 6 in (6.55 m)
- **Wing Area:** 658 sq ft (61.13 m<sup>2</sup>)
- **Empty Weight:** 24,000 lb (10,886 kg)
- **Max Take-off Weight:** 37,000 lb (16,783 kg)

### Performance:

- **Maximum Speed:** 282 mph (454 km/h) at 15,000 ft (4,572 m)
- **Cruising Speed:** 214 mph (344 km/h)
- **Range:** 1,150 miles (1,850 km)
- **Service Ceiling:** 21,700 ft (6,615 m)
- **Rate of Climb:** 2,130 ft/min (10.8 m/s)

### Powerplant:

- **Engines:** 2 × Pratt & Whitney R-2800-5 Double Wasp 18-cylinder radial engines
- **Power Output:** 1,850 hp (1,379 kW) each

### Armament:

- **Guns:**
  - 12 × .50 in (12.7 mm) Browning M2 machine guns
  - Nose turret: 2 guns.
  - Dorsal turret: 2 guns.
  - Tail turret: 2 guns
  - Waist positions: 2 guns each side
  - Forward-firing in the nose: 2 guns
- **Bomb Load:** Up to 4,000 lb (1,814 kg) of bombs

### Design Features:

- **High Wing Loading:** The B-26 had a high wing loading of 56 lb/ft<sup>2</sup>, which required careful handling, especially during take-off and landing.
- **Streamlined Fuselage:** Designed for speed, the B-26 had a streamlined fuselage, contributing to its high maximum speed.
- **Short Wingspan:** The shorter wingspan allowed for higher speeds but required higher landing speeds, making it more challenging to fly.

**Operational Use:** The B-26 Marauder was primarily used in medium-level bombing missions. It faced initial challenges with mechanical reliability and a reputation for being difficult to fly. However, once these issues were addressed and pilot training improved, the B-26 proved to be an effective and reliable bomber with a lower loss rate compared to other aircraft.

The "Mi Laine," like other B-26 Marauders, was part of the U.S. Eighth Air Force's efforts during World War II, contributing to strategic bombing campaigns in Europe. Despite its initial teething problems, the B-26 Marauder earned a respectable place in aviation history for its performance and versatility in combat.

## **Martin Marauder's Last Mission By Fred Lyne March 1988**

In early January 1943, world powers met at Casablanca, North Africa, to discuss ways of ending World War II. The main discussion centred on the proposed strategic bombing of Germany and occupied Europe. A combined bomber offensive, involving Bomber Command and the United States 8th Air Force, was created to conduct a series of raids aimed at the heart of the Third Reich. Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris believed that area bombing of war-torn Europe would bring about an early end to the war by targeting German industries and demoralizing the German people.

Bomber Harris's primary concern was the shortage of aircraft, especially bombers, and trained crews. After the Italians and Germans were cleared from North Africa, surplus aircraft became available, making their deployment to other theatres of war immediately important. RAF Pembrey was expecting the arrival of aircraft from North Africa. One such aircraft was a Martin B-26B Marauder medium bomber being ferried in by a crew of four. Normally, a Marauder would have a complement of seven: two pilots, one navigator, one radio operator, three gunners, and one flight engineer. However, this aircraft had only three officers and one staff sergeant, all American.

The B-26B Marauder was a sizable aircraft, with a wingspan of 71 feet and a length of 58 feet 3 inches. It was powered by two Wright radial engines, capable of producing a top speed of 282 mph and a range of 1,150 miles at 214 mph.

The weather at RAF Pembrey was poor, with the mountain range enveloped in a thick, wet mist. Visual navigation from 500 feet was difficult. Ground control at RAF Pembrey made radio contact with the aircraft sometime between 1400 and 1500 hours (2:00 pm - 3:00 pm). At this time, the aircraft was flying on an east-southeast course somewhere above the A484 road from Trimsaran to Llanelli.

Receiving the new course over the radio, the aircraft banked to starboard, bringing it dangerously low and directly over Penrhyn Farm. Penrhyn Farm, on June 4, 1943, was managed by Mr. and Mrs. Griffith Bonnell, along with their son Hugh and daughter Katie. Preparations were underway for afternoon milking when the drone of the aircraft turned into a frightening nightmare. Katie (now Mrs. Evnon) recalls the event vividly over forty-four years later:

"The weather was very bad; it was foggy and wet. We had just started our milking when there was this terrific crashing noise. I rushed out from the milking shed to see what had happened. The first thing I noticed was that the hay shed had been completely demolished, with its railway girder frame uprooted, badly twisted, and in places sheared by the forceful impact of a crashing aircraft."

Seeing three dead crew members, Mrs. Bonnell assumed that was the total, but the following day a fourth crew member was found further in the field behind a hedge.

At this time, Hugh pedalled down to Pwll Police Station to report the accident. Later, just after the crash, Katie noticed the fields were littered with aircraft parts, emergency food rations, towels, suitcases, clothes, and among other things, a yellow rubber dinghy. The aircraft had completely disintegrated on impact, with its grisly remains spread not only over Penrhyn Farm property but also that of Barclay Farm. One of the engines had careered on and came to rest close to Pant Farm, some 300 yards from the point of impact.

Within the hour, the area was attended by crash tenders and other services of the RAF, including civil police, ambulances, and local fire rangers. RAF personnel stayed at Penrhyn Farm, using an outbuilding from which they conducted their investigation into the crash. When the RAF completed their investigation in June 1943, the aircraft remains were removed and the area restored. The dead crew were conveyed to Cambridge, and it is believed from there to the United States. Two years later, the American government sent compensation to Mr. and Mrs. Bonnell for the damage caused to their property.

Receiving permission from the farmers concerned, I visited the site of the crash to see the area first-hand. Viewing the hay shed, which had been rebuilt, and the high bank and hedge where the Marauder had made its impact all those years ago, one would never have guessed that anything had ever happened there. Inspection with the help of a metal detector showed that a considerable amount of metal remained in the ground. The crash of the aircraft had carried pieces of the fuselage in the intended direction of travel, scattering its broken assemblies over several fields.

Through the bare soil of a stubble field protruded a stainless-steel hose clamp with the maker's name, "Witten Mfg Co., Chicago, USA." Further on and closer to the hedge, exposed pieces of plexiglass glinted in the sun. Ammunition of various calibres, some of which had exploded on impact, came to light. The bases of these brass shells displayed letters and numbers: "RA41," meaning made by the Remington Arms Company, USA, 1941; "DM43," Des Moines Plant, USA, 1943; and "SL42," St. Louis Ordnance Plant, USA, 1942. This ammunition, along with .30 calibre rounds, was used in the aircraft's machine guns. The .45 calibre ammunition was for the personal arms that most American air crews carried. Other items found included instrument dials, one displaying instructions on how to increase and decrease the RPM of an engine's propellers, another from an onboard camera made by "Universal Camera Corp., New York, USA, 1942."

Just below the surface in another field were two brass uniform buckles, some engine spark plugs torn from engines as they careered across the fields, including some unused spark plugs still in their protective plastic covers, probably carried as spares. A small parachute, a socket set, a bomb, an Elgin chronoscope minus its glass and hands, and many other items were also found.

Future farming generations in this area may wonder about the metal pieces that the plough turns up, not knowing about the World War II plane crash or the airmen who came from afar only to die on a lonely Welsh mountaintop.

Today, Penrhyn Farm is managed by Mr. R. Evans and his son Wyn. Barclay Farm is owned and managed by Mr. and Mrs. B. Samuel of Ty-Gwyn Farm. Pant was farmed during the war years by Mr. Jack Evans, now retired and living in Pwll-Llanelli.

Graham T Emmanuel 2024