

# The Story Behind My Paintings

by Charles Thompson with Layne Larsen  
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Thirteen years ago I was approached by a client to do a painting of an event that took place over the island of Canvey in the Thames estuary in 1944 when two B-17s collided with one another. The painting I did was titled "Heavenly Body". I selected the viewing point looking down from the 'offending' aircraft so that its shadow can be seen falling across poor "Heavenly Body". I painted this picture using my normal limited palette of cadmium red, cadmium yellow, ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson and white.



"Heavenly Body"

For the past ten years the client who commissioned it has been delving deeper into the event and had recently arranged for a memorial service in Canvey later in June and where some of the relatives of those who perished are going to attend. He wanted me to depict the same scene, but this time looking up from the other way. I finished the painting, titled "Collision over Canvey", just days before I left to attend the ASAA forum in April. As there was not going

to be any colour in the painting - grey clouds and sky, and natural aluminium finish on the aircraft - I decided to use only two colours, viridian and cadmium red, plus white. These give me better greys than any tube colour on the market.



**"Collision Over Canvey"**

The following is a précis of the events portrayed in the paintings:

Around 1820 hrs, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1944, a formation of B-17 *Flying Fortresses* was approaching Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, over the Thames from Kent. The aircraft, some of which appeared damaged, were from the 525<sup>th</sup> Bomber Squadron, 379<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group which had taken off about 1440 hrs for an attack on a V-1 site at Zudausques/Enquine, France.

As the aircraft crossed the Thames, the squadron's 'tail-end Charlie' 44-6133 piloted by Lt. A.J. Ramacitti appeared to be having engine trouble. He overtook and climbed above the formation before veering downwards into 42-97942 flown by Lt. L.L. Burns, striking it just aft of the cockpit. The two aircraft locked together for an instant before falling away from each other.

44-6133 plunged away in a power dive from about 2600 meters, shedding its wings before crashing into a mine field in the Thames, coming to rest at a depth of about 6 meters. Lt. Burns' aircraft, which appeared to be under control, lost height rapidly as it flew west and a number of the crew bailed out. After passing Canvey point, the aircraft made a port turn heading back towards the foreshore as if to attempt a landing on the mud. However, as it passed Canvey Point, it went into a steep bank and plunged nose first into the mud, burning fiercely.

Of the twenty crewmen aboard the two aircraft, only bombardier, who was seriously injured, survived from 44-6133. Six of Lt. Burns' crew survived. Of the eleven crewmen who perished, only four bodies were recovered and are interred at the American Military Cemetery at Cambridge.